The Flower-Patch Among the Hills

By

FLORA KLICKMANN

Editor of
"The Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine"
Author of
"Between the Larch-woods and the Weir"
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I

Just to Explain

I. Who Everybody is

Virginia and her sister Ursula are my most intimate friends. Virginia—really quite a harmless girl—imagines she has a scientific bias. Ursula—domesticated to the backbone—led a strenuous life in the pursuit of experimental psychology, till she switched off to wash hospital saucepans.

It will be so obvious that I scarcely need add: What little common sense the trio possesses is centred in ME.

Abigail is my housemaid; her title to fame is the fact that she is the only servant I have ever been able to induce to remain more than a fortnight at one stretch in the country. The others, including those who are orphans, always have a parent who suddenly breaks its leg—after they have been about ten days away—and wires for them to come home at once.

The cook has discovered a number of cousins in the Naval Division at the Crystal Palace (detachments of which pass my London house hourly, while many units partake of my cake and lemonade), and, of course, you can't neglect your relatives in war time.

"You never know whether that'll be the last time you'll see them," she says, waving a tearful tea-towel at all and sundry who march past. Naturally, *she* doesn't care to be away from town for many days at a time.

The parlourmaid was interested in a member of the L.C.C. Fire Brigade, when he enlisted, and incidentally married someone else—unfortunately the very week she was away with me. This has given her a marked distaste for the simple pleasures of rural life.

Abigail is unengaged. "What I ask is: What better off are you if you are?" she inquires of space. "Take my sister, now, with eight children, and——" But as I am not taking anyone with eight children just now, the sister's biography is neither here nor there.

Abigail is a willing, kindhearted girl. Also she has a mania for trying to arrange every single household ornament in pairs. She would be invaluable to anyone outfitting a Noah's Ark.

As for the other people who walk through these pages, they do not appertain exclusively to one district. I have had two cottages, one beyond Godalming, in Surrey, the other high up among the hills that border the river Wye. Some of the country folk live in the one village, some in the other; but the scenery, the little

wild things, and the garden are all related to the cottage that overlooks Tintern Abbey.

II. Why the Cottage is

I took a cottage in the country on a day when I had got to the fag-end of the very last straw, and felt I could not endure for another minute the screech of the trains, the honking of motors, the clanging of bells, the clatter of milk-carts, the grind-and-screel of electric cars, the ever-ringing telephone, the rattle and roar of the general traffic, the all-pervading odour of petrol, and the many other horrors that make both day and night hideous in our great city, and reduce the workers to nervous wreckage.

The cottage has been so arranged that not one solitary thing within its walls shall bear any relation to the city left far behind; and nothing is allowed to remind the occupants of the business rush, the social scramble, and the electric-light-type of existence that have become integral parts of modern life in towns.

Here, to keep my idle hands from mischief, I made me a Flower-patch.

III. Why this Book is

I was viciously prodding up bindweed out of the cottage garden, with the steel kitchen poker, when the telegraph boy opened the gate.

Unhinging my back, and inducing it into the upright with painful care, I read a message from my office to the effect that there was some hitch in regard to the American copyright of a certain article I had passed for press before leaving; this would necessitate it being thrown out of the magazine that month. Would I wire back what should go in its place, as the machines were at a standstill?

Under ordinary circumstances I should merely have waved a hand, and instantly a suitable substitute would have been on the machines with scarcely a perceptible pause—that is, if I had been in London. But such is the witchery of the Flower-patch, that no sooner do I get inside the gate than I forget every mortal thing connected with my office. And try how I would, I couldn't recall what possible articles I had already in hand that would make exactly six pages and a quarter—the length of the one held over.

And because I could think of nothing else on the spur of the moment, I threw down the poker (it was red-rust, alas, when I chanced upon it a week later) and went indoors and wrote about the cottage and the hills.

When it was published in the magazine, readers very kindly wrote by the bagful begging for a continuation. It has been continuing—with perennial requests for more—for some time

now. This only shows how generously tolerant of editors are the readers of periodical literature.

Virginia merely sniffs, "What won't people buy!"

I don't think she need have put it so baldly as that.

If by some miraculous chance there should be any profits from the sale of this book, I intend to devote them to the purchase of a cow (or hen, if it doesn't run to a cow), to aid the national larder. I shall call it "the Memorial Cow," in memory of those who have been good enough to assist in its purchase.

Should any reader wish to have the cow (or hen) named specially after him—or her—self, this could doubtless be arranged. Particulars on application to the publisher.

II

About Getting There

We always consider that emancipation takes place at one exact spot on the Great Western Railway; the only difficulty is that Virginia and I never agree as to which is the exact spot.

Virginia insists that the air suddenly changes just beyond Chepstow Station, where we change from the London and South Wales main line to the local train that, two or three times a day (week-days only), runs through our particular Valley, like a small boy's toy affair.

This train, which makes up in black smoke for what it lacks of other dignity, steams out of the main line junction with an important snort and rumble; over the bridge it goes, and the stranger would imagine it was well under way. But no; it then comes to a standstill at the point where the main line and the Valley line meet, in order that the gentleman who lives—we presume—in the signal-box (but who is always standing on the railway line when we see him) may hand to our engine-driver a metal staff—some sort of a key, they tell me, which is said to unlock the single railway line. I don't pretend to understand the process myself. I only know that our engine-driver looks lovingly at it as though it were the apple of his eye (I've

craned my head out of the window, that's how I know), and clasps it to his chest, until he gets to the first station on the Valley line, where he hands it over to the station-master, who, in turn, gives him another one, to which he clings just as pathetically.

In this leisurely way we proceed up the Valley.

It wouldn't have any deep significance, but for the fact that Virginia maintains it is the first key that unlocks the imprisoned Ego within her, and sets her soul free from the trammels and shackles and cobwebs and chains, hampering, warping, and enmeshing her, that have been riveted by the blighting tendencies of London (and a lot more to the same effect). She says she feels the fetters burst directly that key is handed over, for she knows then that the train is beyond the possibility of making a mistake, and getting back on to the London main line again instead of the single pair of Valley rails.

Then it is that the air becomes fresher than ever. The primroses that grow all up the rocks, just beyond the signal-box, are very much finer than those on the junction side; the Sweet Betsey (alias red valerian) starts to drape the ledges with rosy-crimson as soon as the signal-man walks back up the wooden steps to his cabin. And Virginia herself becomes a different being, though opinions are painfully divided as

to whether the change is for the better or for the worse.

She says she feels just like the Lord Mayor, or the Speaker in the House of Commons, with a myrmidon going on ahead of her bearing the mace.

We just let her talk on when she gets light-headed like this. After all, this Rod of Office which the engine-driver cherishes is what Virginia waits for through four hours of express train—six if you go by a slow one. And the spot where he receives it on the line is where she develops a beatific smile of wondrous amiability.

For me, the chains snap a little further on.

After the driver has received his Key of Office the train meanders peacefully through west country orchards, placid meadows, and tawny-gold cornfields; past grey-brown hay-stacks; past little cottages, each with its pig-sty and scratting hens, and a clothes-line displaying pinafores and sundry other garments only mentioned *sotto voce* in the paper pattern section of ladies' papers. Small, hatless, yellow-haired children, gathering daisies or cowslips in adjoining fields, wave at us as we go by.

Then the engine braces itself for a mighty effort, and gives a business-like shriek on its whistle (this is the great exploit of the whole journey) as it plunges into a very long, dark, clattering tunnel, cut through solid rock. Here

we sit in the breathless darkness for several minutes, to emerge finally upon scenery so unlike that we left behind at the entrance to the tunnel as to suggest that we had entered another country.

Gone are the cornfields, the gentle undulations, gone the farms and cottages, the hayricks and barns. Almost in sheer precipices the rocks rise up from the rushing winding river in the valley below, clothed from summit to base with forest trees. The train, now an insignificant atom on the face of Nature, puffs vigorously along a ledge cut half-way up the face of these giant hills.

From the windows on one side of the train you look down upon a world of rocks, trees and water, to the Horse Shoe bend, where the river turns and twists and doubles back on itself again. Not a house is in sight.

The windows on the other side show more grey rocks rising up out of sight, with trees growing where you would scarcely think they could find root-hold, much less food to live and thrive on. And where it is bare stone, and there are no trees, the scarred and jagged surface of the rocks—due to far-away earth-rends and more modern rock-slides—is lovingly swathed and festooned with trails of Travellers' Joy and ivy and bryony; while ferns and foxgloves, wild strawberries and Mother of Millions flourish on

the narrow ledges, and sprout out from sheltered crannies—such a mist of delicate loveliness veiling all that is grim and cold and hard.

Even the wooden posts, from which wire is stretched to fence off the railway company's land from the adjoining woods, are entirely covered with a living mosaic of small-leaved ivy, patterned, with no two scrolls alike, in a way that human hand could never copy.

Below there is always the river, that swirls and rushes noisily at low tide over its weirs. A heron stands motionless on a grey-green moss-covered boulder near the bank. He looks up at the little train; but it is too far away to worry him. He, and a kite circling high overhead, are the only signs of life to be seen as one passes along. Yet the whole earth is teeming with small folk, furred and feathered; the rarest of butterflies are glinting over the rocks; the otter is hiding down in the river-pools; and from time to time a salmon leaps into the air, a flash, a streak of silver, and a series of eddying ripples—that is all.

This is the spot where, for me, a new life begins; where unconsciously I draw my breath with a deep intake, and suddenly feel the past slipping from me; the noise and din, the sordidness and care of the city fade into the background and become nothing more substantial than some remote nightmare.

Here in this Valley of Peace and Quietness my dreams become realities. And best of all, here God seems to lay His Hand on tired heart and tired brain; and I find myself saying, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing."

We had just witnessed the presentation of the first key. As usual, Virginia and I had been arguing—no, that isn't the right word; I never argue; I merely discuss things intelligently. At any rate, we had been exchanging views (that differed) as to the exact place where we noticed the great change come over ourselves in particular, and things in general. As we didn't get any nearer a final settlement we appealed to Ursula, who was sitting silent, with a far-away look in her eyes, as of one engaged in bridging space and measuring the stars.

She came back to earth, however, at our question, and said she was absolutely sure the moment of *her* great transformation was when she got hold of a cup of proper domestic tea, as distinct from the indigestive railway variety. Indeed, for the past few minutes she had been entirely absorbed in the mental contemplation of the meal she hoped Abigail would soon be preparing. Even then she could smell the sizzling ham and the frying eggs and the buttered toast we should have on arrival.

We were in the sulphurous depths of the tunnel at the moment. Naturally I was hurt. As I said to her, I knew my board was frugal, and my viands simple, modest, unaffected and unassuming, but at least they didn't smell like *that!*

Fortunately she hadn't much time to explain what she did and what she didn't mean, for we came out of the tunnel into the panorama of hills and silence; no one ever talks much just here, save the braying type of tourist.

Besides, there is the "Abbey" to watch for. No matter how many times you may see that, you always wait expectantly for the moment when you catch the first glimpse of the wonderful grey ruin.

The abbey-makers of the olden days not only knew how to build, but they also knew how to "place" their beautiful structures. And the setting of our Abbey is as nearly perfect as anything can be in this world.

The steep hills recede a little bit just at one bend of the river, leaving room for a broad green meadow between the water and the uprising steeps. Here the Abbey was placed: a babbling river in the foreground, dark larch-covered hills in the background. Surely it is no fanciful exaggeration to think that the beauty all around them must have influenced the men who raised that wonderful poem in stone!

I would like to take you into the Abbey and show you the beautiful views that can be seen from every ruined window, each one a framed picture in itself; the spray of oak-leaves carved on one piece of stone, the live snapdragons growing out of buttresses, the graceful spring of each slender arch, the perfect proportions of the whole building, for, despite the cruel wreckage it suffered in the past, it is still the most lovely Gothic ruin in England.

But to-day we can't stay.

The train hurries on, through another short tunnel, over a bridge spanning the river and a talkative weir, and then into our station.

In the summer there is a good deal of bustle in this station, which is the haunt of many tourists. I am told that five out of every ten visitors are from the United States. No American thinks of "doing" England without seeing our valley, which is famous for its scenery and its ruins. Thus you always find a number of women in trim "shirt-waists," and wearing large chiffon veils on the top of their hats at angles quite unknown to the English woman, sitting on the platform about train time, writing the usual budget of picture postcards.

But we aren't "foreigners" (as the natives style everyone who doesn't belong to their village). That is one of the many charms of arriving at this station. Here no one regards us

merely as passengers who can't find their luggage; or, passengers who have changed where they had no business to; or, passengers who expect the local porter to know by heart all the railway connections and times of return trains throughout the British Isles. Neither are we among the people who look suspiciously at every wagonette driver, certain that he is going to overcharge, and uncertain as to which is likely to overcharge the least. We have no anxieties concerning the truth of the advertised merits of the various hotels, and apartments to let, in the village.

We "belong."

There is a sense of home-coming in our arrival. The porters actually rush forward to help with our luggage, and the station-master raises his cap.

Old Bob—who occupies the doubly proud position of being the only one among the fly proprietors who displays a pair of steeds attached to his vehicle, while he is also the one who usually drives what he describes as "the e-light-y"—is waiting with his wagonette (and pair, don't forget) and a cart for the luggage.

It really is comforting to be claimed by someone at the end of a journey, if it be but the wagonette driver. I feel so solitary, such an orphan, when I chance to arrive alone at some strange place in quest of a holiday, possibly unknown to a single person but the landlady-to-be.

Don't you know the sinking feeling that comes over you as you look round upon the crowds of people, some scrambling in, and some scrambling out of the train; every face a blank so far as you are concerned? No one to trouble whether you ever get any further, or whether you remain in that jostling turmoil for ever.

You almost wish you could get into the train and go back to town again; you reflect that there at least the butcher knows you, and the people next door, and the crossing-sweeper at the corner.

You revive after having some tea, but it is possible to spend a very doleful, homesick quarter of an hour between the time you get out of the train and the time you sit down to a meal in some strange room, whose painful unlikeness to the ones you live in accentuates your loneliness.

But that never happens to us in our Valley. Before we have got out of our compartment, Abigail is already on the platform and holding a levee consisting of two porters, the signalman, the assistant engine-driver from a goods train in the siding, and old Bob's nephew, who drives the cart. All lend a hand as she proceeds to marshal the luggage, and with a peremptory wave of her umbrella, directs its disposal.

Of course there really isn't much luggage. That is one of the advantages of retreating to

your own secluded cottage; being off the beaten track as we are, there is no necessity to take many "toilettes"—either demi or semi—or a large variety of lounge robes, or matinées, or boudoir negligées, or rest frocks, or tea-gowns, or cocoa-coats, or evening wraps built of chiffon, and really necessary, handy things of that sort. All we take with us is just a few clothes to wear.

On one occasion Virginia did bring down a long "article" (I don't know what else to call it) composed of about ten yards of white net, embroidered here and there with large beads, an artificial rose sewn on to one corner of the curtain-like thing, a gilt-metal fringe suggestive of shoelace tags all around the edges. She couldn't quite understand how she came by it, she said. She remembered an energetic ultra-elegant shop-assistant, somewhere, displaying it before her, with the information that it was a "slumber swirl," and assuring her, condescendingly, that it was the very latest, and absolutely sweet, and just the thing for outdoors in the summer. Virginia said she agreed with her, she was sure; knowing her own sweet and plastic disposition, she would certainly have agreed with her; she was thankful to say she wasn't one of those people who perpetually disagree with other people. But—she had no recollection of having attached her name and address to the wisp, much

less of having paid for it! Still, the energetic damsel had sent it home—and here it was!

Ursula, after one glance at the confection, hastily turned her eyes away and announced that, for her part, she didn't consider it—well, quite adequate!

Her sister explained that it wasn't supposed to be worn *that* way; and she arranged herself with closed eyes on the sofa to show us how it would look when draped over her—head and all—as she rested in the hammock. It took a lot of adjusting so as to avoid getting some knobbly bead motif just under her ear, and to prevent the shoe-lace tags attacking the under-side of the face. And when she had at last found a spot of unembellished net on which to lay her rose-leaf cheek, she was afraid to move for fear of splitting the frail net.

Ursula merely snorted.

When next I saw the "slumber swirl," part of it had been converted into a meat-safe of irreproachable moral character, Ursula having utilised the frame of our getting-worn-out one for the purpose.

No; our luggage is only trifling, and only consists of just what we need. Abigail takes mine and her own to Paddington in a bus, which also picks up the luggage of the other two girls *en route*. Individually, the details do not seem

much, but I confess, when I see it dumped all together on the platform, the aggregate looks somewhat nondescript.

There will be four large hat-boxes (or five if Abigail brings more than one); anything from three to seven trunks; Abigail's collapsible straw basket; a bundle of umbrellas and sunshades; the dog, in his travelling basket; a chip basket containing pots of mysterious seedlings Virginia has been specially raising in town (which usually get upset once or twice on the way, and have been known to turn out docks). There is sure to be a cardboard box for one of Abigail's best Jap silk Sunday frocks that she doesn't want to get crushed; a string bag containing Abigail's novels and snippety weeklies, her crochet, a few oranges, two bananas, some chocolate, and whatever other refreshment she will need on the journey; a brown-paper parcel holding a few articles of wearing apparel, also belonging to Abigail, that she only remembered at the last minute, and cook did up for her.

Then Ursula is sure to bring some contribution to the larder—perhaps tomatoes and a cake. Naturally, there is our lunch basket; and I personally, never feel complete unless I have my leather dispatch-box beside me. I also take a suit-case containing my mackintosh—in case it rains when I arrive—books and papers which I never read, knitting, and similar necessities for

the journey ; it is also useful as a final receptacle for oddments I omitted to pack elsewhere. Virginia and Ursula bring similar suit-cases, for similar reasons.

Sometimes Abigail springs surprises on us at the last minute. "Whatever have you there?" I asked one day, as she joined us on the Paddington platform, a jangling parcel in one hand that sounded like a badly cracked bell, and a large protrusion—silent, fortunately—embraced in the other arm.

"Oh, this is just a new zinc pail" (shaking the musical packet), "we need an extra one ; and I've put in a little iron shovel, as I want one for my kitchen scuttle : and there's a nutmeg grater too ; the one down there is getting rusty. And *this*" (nodding towards her chest) "is an enamel washing-up bowl. Our big one down there leaks."

And she proceeded serenely on her way to the accompaniment of iron shovel clink-clanging against zinc pail, with the nutmeg-grater tintinnabulating cheerfully in a higher key—and evidently pleased at the public interest she was arousing.

Not that her surprises are always so useful. On one occasion I noticed she had brought two collapsible straw baskets, but concluded she had some very special new frocks for the flower show. The porter disposed of the luggage—while

Abigail was looking the bookstall over. When she returned and found both baskets missing, she rushed to the guard's van. Soon things were being dragged out again, Abigail excitedly urging haste. The guard helped, Abigail assisting with much conversation.

Eventually she lugged one basket up to her own compartment, scorning the help of the penitent porter. As she passed my compartment, a heartrending "mee-au" came from the basket.

"What in the world—!!—!!!" I began.

"It's only Angelina," Abigail explained. "She hasn't seemed well lately. I thought a change of air might do her good. Only it gave me a bit of a fright when I found they'd put her in the van, thinking she was luggage!"

(Incidentally, Angelina is *my* cat.)

Being my own place and not someone else's we are going to, it occasionally happens that there are items of furnishing that need to go down, a mirror, for instance, that is too large to pack in a trunk. Strictly speaking, the railway company might be within their rights if they argued that such things could not legitimately be called passenger's luggage; but Virginia said, with regard to the mirror—4 feet × 2—that if they objected to take it, she should tell them every woman is entitled to carry a mirror among her personal luggage.

Fortunately no one so far has objected to any

of the details of our *impedimenta*, so long as the excess charges are promptly paid. We usually go down with the same guard. I tell him what the contraband is. He carries the parcel off majestically, assuring me that his one eye won't leave it all the way down, no matter where the other may be focused; and he begs me to have no anxiety as to its safety. I haven't. I know from long experience that the guards and officials on the G.W.R. have elevated politeness and courtesy from a mere duty to a fine art.

Sometimes I almost wish they wouldn't take quite such care of our things! There was the brown pitcher, for instance. I had been wanting a very large one for fetching the water from the spring outside the cottage gate. Of course, I know you can get big enamel jugs (painted duck-egg blue, or anything else in the art line that you fancy); but the latter seems so strident, so townified, so newly-rich, so over-dressed, when you see them beside our moss-grown wooden spout, where the mountain spring splashes down into a stony hollow, among ferns and long mosses. The sturdy but humble brown pitcher tones in better with the pale yellow sand in the bottom of the hollow, the browns and greys and greens of the stones and growing things all round. The very water falls into it with a mellow musical sound, instead of the hollow tinny ring that the enamelled creature gives forth.

But I couldn't see one in the village shop as big as I required. Ursula, however, ran against the very thing unexpectedly in town. The only difficulty was the packing, so she decided to carry it just as it was. Virginia expressed a sincere hope that she would at least tie a pale blue bow on the handle.

She got it safely as far as Paddington, but here an iron pillar suddenly ran alongside and torpedoed the pitcher—so she said—knocking a small but very business-like hole clean through its bulging side. Then the question arose : What was she to do with the remnants ? The train was due to start in two minutes, so she hadn't time to inquire for the station dust-bin.

Virginia suggested that she should try to induce the bookstall boy to accept it as payment for a packet of milk chocolate ; failing that, she had better put an advertisement in the paper offering a wonderful specimen of antique Roman pottery in exchange for a sable motoring coat, or a cartload of white mice.

What she did do was to leave it tidily on the nearest seat, with the intention of bestowing sixpence on the first porter she could waylay if he would make himself responsible for its after career. But apparently every employee at Paddington Station had enlisted.

The whistle was blown, and the train started to move slowly, just as the vigilant eye of the

guard fell upon the disabled crock. His face lighted up. He seized it, rushed to the moving compartment containing Ursula. "Madam," he gasped, "you have forgotten this," and he thrust it into her arms.

She didn't dare try to leave it behind any more!

Then there was the fish. It was on an occasion when Virginia was coming down by herself, and thus lacked the restraining, and more practical, hand of Ursula. Now, as I have already hinted, Virginia is an intelligent girl. She can tell you exactly how many million tons of certain chemicals could be excavated from the very bottom of Vesuvius (if only they could manage to put the fire out, of course), and how, if these million tons were applied to the land in Mars, as artificial manure, the wheat crop they would produce in one year—if only you could raise their temperature a few hundred degrees, and this could easily be done if you transfer—by wireless—the heat that isn't needed in Vesuvius to Mars (or is it the moon?), where they do want it—why, then—(where was I?)—Oh, yes, the wheat crop they would harvest per annum would be sufficient to feed the whole of the inhabitants of this planet of ours, and several others thrown in, for—I forgot how many dozen years.

Yes, she is a very bright girl, just as well informed on any other subject you like to mention—excepting fish! There she draws a woeful blank: she has no more notion how to tell fresh fish at sight than a baby!

Still, she is generous in her intentions, and as no one ever thinks of journeying to the cottage without taking something in the eatable line—it is only right to take a little present when you go to stay with friends, isn't it?—Virginia cast about as to what she could bring. Game has no attraction—we have plenty of that. Fish, on the contrary, is a rarity. Although our river is full, we seldom see fish at the cottage, excepting a very over-due variety that a man peddles round occasionally.

So she decided on fish—alas! And hastened into the first fishmonger's she saw and ordered a dozen pairs of soles. She maintains that wasn't what she meant to ask for. It was oysters she wanted to bestow on me, and she went in with the definite intention of purchasing a dozen oysters. At that moment, however, her mind was somewhat pre-occupied with a scientific invention she was thinking out, whereby no woman need ever again handle a broom or carpet-sweeper or anything of that kind.

It was a simple device, consisting of a vacuum between the layers of leather on the bottom of the shoe, and some sort of a suction arrangement

whereby you drew up the dust from the carpet (or wherever you walked) just by stepping on it. You would clear as you go, and instead of a person trailing dirt up and down the stairs by walking straight in from the garden and up to the top attic, they would really be giving the stair carpet what would be equal to a good brushing.

Moreover, not only would spring cleaning be banished for ever—when her invention was perfected—but your shoes would never more need mending. The dust collected in the shoe, being subject to so many cubic inches of pressure due to the person standing on top of the shoe, would become so compressed and self-adhesive as to offer a direct resistance to the friction set up between boot and alien matter trodden upon, equal to the inverse ratio of—I haven't the faintest notion what! But I dare say you can follow her line of argument. She herself says she is always lucid and concise.

At any rate, I remember she said that it was terribly hard to be the mother of a huge family of boys, who not only trailed dust and dirt into the house at all times and seasons, but also wore out innumerable pairs of boots into the bargain. Whereupon I reminded her that neither of us need worry personally about that just yet!

She agreed, but said that did not alter her desire to benefit her day and generation, and to

rid the world of "the Burden of the Broom." And she was meditating on this, and thinking of all the leather we had wasted by letting it wear off the bottoms of our boots, when she saw the fish shop, and though she *thought* a dozen "oysters," what she *said* was a dozen "pairs of soles"—and, of course, I would recognise that the mistake wasn't her fault; it was entirely due to the psychological action of the subconscious something that connected soles with boots, etc.

Anyhow, the result was that she paid cheerfully for such a collection of fish as I hope I may never see again. And how happy that fishmonger must have been, when the transaction was completed, only those who got a whiff of the fish can estimate.

Virginia admitted that she thought the price seemed a lot for a dozen oysters (soles were two shillings a pound at the time), and the bag seemed heavy. Also, she confessed that it was a trifle more than she had intended to spend on a present for me at that moment, though she, being a real lady, would have been the last to mention it if I hadn't. No, she hadn't thought to look at what he put in; she merely told him to pack them up very securely, as she was going a long railway journey. She didn't know they were soles till she glanced at the bill in the train. She consoled me with the information that fish has the most wonderful phosphorescent properties, invaluable

in the case of brain-fag; and she should see that I ate it all!

After a few miles of the journey the soles grew a little noisy in the rack. You don't want to look a gift-horse in the mouth—truth to tell, I didn't want to look at that particular gift at all. But I had to open both windows.

At our first stop, Reading, when the guard came to the door and politely inquired, "Are you ladies all right? Can I get you anything?" I asked him if he would be so good as to take charge of the big rush bag. I suggested that he could tie it on to the back buffer at the very end of the train. I assured him it was nothing that would hurt. But he only smiled, and said he had plenty of room in his own compartment; the basket would be quite safe there, no one would touch it. I could quite believe it!

When he came down the platform at Swindon he looked very pale and out of sorts, I thought. Conscience-stricken, I pressed a shilling into his hand, and begged him to get himself a good cup of tea. He said he would, and certainly seemed to have revived when next he passed.

We got it home, eventually, without Abigail detecting it—I wanted to save Virginia's face before the handmaiden—as we took the basket, wrapped up in my mackintosh, in the wagonette with us, Abigail following behind in the luggage-cart. She did say later, however, that she wished

that pedlar and his awful kippers and bloaters could be suppressed by law. He had evidently just been round, she said, and she could smell his wretched fish all the way as she drove up. We didn't tell her what we had hidden in the old barn.

We buried them darkly at dead of night. The only soft spot we could find, that admitted of a good-sized trench being dug without much trouble, was the moist earth beside the brook in the lower orchard.

Next morning, at breakfast-time, when the small dog ran in to greet us, his nose and paws showed signs of active service as he joyfully dabbed brown mud on the front of our fresh print frocks, and waggled his tail with the air of a dog who is conscious of heroic achievements. Abigail followed him with the bacon-dish, which, in her excitement, she tried to balance on the top of the coffee-pot.

"You'd never believe what a high tide there has been in the brook!" she began. "A spring tide, I should think. It's washed up hundreds and hundreds and *hundreds* of large fish on to the bank. Never saw such a thing in my life before. First I knew of it was slipping on one on the kitchen hearthrug. Dandie had brought one in—wanted me to grill it for his breakfast, I suppose! Then I found he'd carried one up to the mat outside your bedroom door,

and just dropped a few others here and there about the house. So I went out to see where he got 'em from. Judging by the smell, they must have lain there for weeks. Wish I'd been here with a net at the time. I've never caught a live fish in my life, though I've often tried to fish in the pond on Peckham Rye."

Naturally we expressed great interest, and suggested immediate cremation in the kitchener.

Later on, the handy man was decidedly sceptical. His grandfeyther had once caught a trout in that brook (only he gave long biographical, geographical and historical details, which proved that it wasn't that brook at all); but he hadn't a-seed any hisself a-coming down.

Abigail scornfully pointed out that high tides came *up*, and these fish had been washed *up* from the river, which is 700 feet below; and she flapped one as evidence before his astonished eyes.

Seeing is believing in our village!

To this day Abigail's tales, to cook and co. and her friends at home, of how she goes out and catches soles as large as plaice in our own brook, and boils them for supper, equal any fish stories ever told!

But to return to the luggage and ourselves, which I left waiting at our little station.

While the luggage is being stowed into the

vehicles, we take stock of the platform, that seems to fancy itself the pivot of the universe! Everybody that is going away scrambles into the train with precipitate haste, as though they were trying to catch a train on the Tube, or a sprinting motor-bus in the Strand! although they know quite well that the peaceful old engine — already twenty-five minutes behind time—won't think of stirring again until it has had a ten minutes' nap!

Those who have just arrived seem equally in a hurry to get somewhere else, and they try to squeeze three thick out of the small station gate—only to plant themselves in the path just outside for a long gossip with the first person they see.

There are women with empty baskets returning from market, and women seeing off friends, each carrying a huge "bookey" of flowers, built up in the approved style, from the back: first a big background rhubarb leaf, or something equally green and spacious, then some striped variegated grass—gardeners' garters, we call it; also some southernwood—better known as Old Man's Beard; tall flowers like foxgloves, phlox, Japanese anemones, early dahlias and sunflowers follow; the shorter stems of pinks, calceolarias, sweet williams and roses are the next in succession; finishing off with some gorgeous pansies and a very fat cabbage rose with a short stem

(that persists in tumbling out), a piece of sweet-briar, and a few silver and gold everlasting flowers down low in the front. If you have a geranium in your window, etiquette demands that you add the best spray—as a special offering—to the bunch, telling your friend all about the way you got that geranium cutting, and the trouble you had to rear it.

You know the sort of complacent well-packed bunches that are the result of this combination. Not artistic, of course, according to town standards, but, all the same, they are dears; and I always feel I want every one I see.

The station itself is a flower garden. And even in the space outside, where the motor-cars await the rich, and the wagonettes and carts await the nearly-poor, primroses and violets and cowslips and bluebells grow thick on the banks.

Naturally the arrival of the train is a matter of local importance, and if you happen to be near the station about train-time you go in and sit on the platform just to see who comes or goes.

And how well everybody looks, and sturdy, and brown, after the pale anæmic faces we have left in town! You think how happy they must all be here in the fresh air and the sunshine. So they ought to be, and so most of them could be, if only they kept a look-out for happiness, and seized all that came their way. But human

nature the world over seems to love to contemplate the tragic, or at least to pity itself! The result is that every other person you meet in our village will tell you a tale of woe as highly-coloured as anything you hear in town.

"How do you do?" I inquired, last time I arrived, of a comfortable healthy-looking woman, who had just been seeing her daughter off by train. Her husband is a steady man, in regular work. She owns the cottage she lives in, and a pig, and has no difficulty in supplying the wants of her family, which are few.

"Oh, I'm not up to much, m'm," she began. "Things is so hard nowadays, and no one gives *we* a bit o' help. There's that Jane Price, *she* got a pound of tea, and a hundudweight of coal, and a red flannel petticut, from the lady of the manor at Christmas, and *she* be a widder with on'y her children. But *I* on'y got some tea and a petticut (not a nice colour red neither), no coal nor nothing, and thur I've got *he* to keep as well as the children, and in course I need it wuss'n her do!"

Further along the platform I spoke to the wife of a small farmer, a healthy soul, with nothing much to worry her. But she didn't intend to be behindhand with trouble! Other people found plenty to moan about; she wasn't to be outdone.

"You've heard of the awful time I'm having

with my husband? Fell down in the wood and broke his leg in four places! Suffers terrible, he does."

I expressed sympathy, and asked how long he had been in bed.

"Oh, he isn't in bed; can't spare the time to lay up, with the haymaking just on. He's cutting the five-acre field to-day. He gets about, but he has an abundation of pain at nights. Yes, you're right. Very active he is, there's no keeping him still. He'll walk to his own funeral, *he* will."

Actually the man had a touch of rheumatism!

Finally we are settled in the fly, piled up with the lighter luggage, while Abigail and old Bob's nephew follow in the cart.

To the stranger who has never been in our Valley before, the drive to the Cottage is a thing of wonder; to those of us who do the journey many times in the course of the year new beauties are always revealing themselves, and the whole scene seems more lovely each time we look upon it, if that be possible.

The station is on the river level, down in the green depths of the Valley. But you cannot go many yards on level ground, as the hills on either side of the river are steep, with nothing but the narrowest footpath in places, between their precipitous sides and the fast-rushing water,

In many cases the cottage-gardens on the hill-side have to be kept up with walls of stone—as one sees the vineyards built up on steep hill-sides in vine-growing districts—otherwise the rains and swollen brooks would wash the earth down, in the winter, into the river below.

The horses start the ascent as soon as they leave the station, and pass through the small village, which shows a curious medley in the way of architecture. In the wall of an old cow-house there is a Gothic window, built probably with stones taken from the ruined Abbey; all the windows of one cottage bear an ecclesiastical stamp. Before the beautiful ruin was carefully guarded as it is now, people must have gone and helped themselves as they pleased to carved stonework and any fragment that they could make use of; and thus you may find an exquisite bit of carved stone in a most ordinary three-roomed dwelling. Some of the cottages and barns may have been part of the Abbey property; at any rate one comes on architectural surprises in the most unexpected places.

But even though in this district man's handiwork has achieved wondrous things, it is the work of Nature that claims the attention.

The Abbey seems a huge pile when you stand under its roofless walls; but once you start to ascend the hills, everything takes on new

proportions. No longer are you shut in by two high green hill-walls, the higher you go the smaller become the hills that are nearest to you, as they reveal far greater giants behind them. The blue Welsh mountains rise up, still further beyond again.

Below, the river winds and loses itself, seeming to come to an abrupt end against a barrier of dark green slopes; but it evidently finds a way out, for it is seen further on in the far distance, a silver, gleaming band, still winding, and still guarded by mountains that now are tinged with the purply-blue tone that Nature uses for her distant effects.

The lanes through which we pass are miracles of loveliness, with their ferns and flowers and birds and butterflies. But I think one's overwhelming thought is of the grandeur of the distances. One is always looking away to the far-off, to the farms and small homesteads dotted at rare intervals on far heights and among the forests; to the peaks beyond peaks; to the light playing on miles of birch and oak; to the shadowy coombes where hills drop down into other valleys.

I have always noticed, when I am bringing anyone for the first time from the station to my house, that, though I point out the roadside springs and waterfalls, the glory of the hedges, the rose-coloured honeysuckle that grows over

one cottage, smothering roof, chimneys and all, the visitors do not expend so much admiration on any of this, it is always the inexplicable mystery of the hills that holds them. Every five minutes takes one higher, and reveals a further panorama. Beautiful as are the lesser things, lovely as is the old ruined Abbey, the human and the near seem to slip away from you as you look across the deep chasm where the river lies below, to the vastness on the other side. There is a power, a force born of great heights and great spaces, that cannot be explained, but is surely felt by all who have not mortgaged their soul to mammon. There was a depth of mystic meaning in the words of the shepherd poet, even in the world's young days, when he wrote: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

It takes you about an hour to drive up to the cottage, and by this time the lane has grown so narrow—and so bumpy !—that you marvel the horses have ever got you there at all. But when you have reached the little white gate you stand and look in silence. A new touch is added to the landscape. You are now high enough to look over the tops of some of the intervening hills, and there away beyond, between a dip in the hills, you see a gleaming band of silver, the waters of the Channel.

Some people consider no scenery perfect

unless there is a railway in the foreground to take them back to town as soon as possible. Some artists always want a touch of scarlet to complete any picture. Myself, I always think a glimpse of water is needed to make a beautiful view absolutely satisfying. At my cottage I am doubly blessed! I can see the river in the Valley below, and beyond there is the Channel, towards which that river is ever hurrying.

During the drive up, the small white dog with brown ears, sits on the box seat, dividing his time between shrieking Billingsgate insults to every local dog (I blush for his manners And he looks so refined too!) and licking old Bob's face. Not that he has any particular affection for our driver, but he gets quite hysterical when he sees the countryside and scents the rabbits; and old Bob is the handiest recipient for his overwhelming gratitude. A few dogs trail after us through the village, telling him—and one another—what they will do when they get hold of him; but they fall back when it comes to the hill; and our own treasure looks triumphantly ahead for new dogs to revile; deluding himself with the idea that he has slain all behind him, and left their corpses in the road! Occasionally he ceases to be a bullying war-dog, and becomes almost human; then he suddenly looks round at us, wags his tail all he knows how, and gives a little whimper that

plainly says, "Isn't it good to be here again!" And we all agree.

It *is* good to see the hills, and the valleys, the sturdy trees, and the tender little ferns growing out of the walls. Best of all, it is good to see the small white gate, and the red-tiled roof, and the blue smoke curling up, oh, so peacefully, from the cottage chimney. It is good to see the flowers smothering the walls and the garden beds; and very good to greet one's own furniture again, one's own rooms, one's own familiar things—no matter how humble they may be.

For months we have clean forgotten that the living-room window requires two thumps if it is to be got open; yet without a moment's hesitation Ursula pulls off her gloves the moment we enter the door, makes straight for the window, and gives it the requisite couple of vigorous bangs, so as to let in the evening scent of the honeysuckle that is thick about the porch. For months, it may be, we have forgotten entirely that the lid of the biggest brown teapot has a knack of tumbling off into the teacup, unless it is held on while one pours. And yet, the moment I take up that teapot again, instinctively my hand grips the lid.

There is an indefinable spirit of welcome in all these little familiar things—so commonplace and feeble and stupid they would seem to out-

siders; yet to us they imply that "we belong." It is part of the all-pervading rest that we find among these hills, that we go on from just where we left off last time. We don't have to start afresh, or get acquainted with the place, or learn anything new. There is a great charm in returning to familiar scenes that is missed by those who are always rushing off on some new quest. True, they may find interest in another direction; but I think with most of us—excepting when we are very young and very inexperienced—the homing instinct is strong.

I have laid my battered brain on pillows in some of the largest hotels in the world; but I have never known in any of them the peaceful rest that is to be found in the cottage bedroom, despite its sloping roof. I'm not saying that there is nothing whatever to disturb one there—all too often Mr. and Mrs. Starling (several of them) persist in building under the tiles just above my head, and the various families demand breakfast at 3.30. Yet I even get to sleep through this.

There is one thing, however, that always wakes me and calls me in a most peremptory manner to get up, and that is the return of the swallows one morning in April or May, when the sites are being chosen for the new nests under the eaves. It is such a sweet little chatter, such a bubbling over of comment and advice and

reminiscence, as they get their first beakful of mud, and start to lay the foundation-stone of the nest.

What do they say? I often wonder. They seem to talk the whole time, and explain to each other the excellent residential qualities of their various positions. One thing I am sure they say —and they twitter it over and over again—I know they mean it, though I don't understand their language; for the homing instinct is strong in them, as it is in all of Nature's children; and as I listen to them in the early morning, I can almost hear their words, "Isn't it good to be here again?"

III

At the Sign of the Rosemary Bush

When the cottage was originally built—about one hundred and thirty years ago—it was probably just two rooms upstairs, one going out of the other, and a kitchen and scullery downstairs. In the intervening years, however, one owner has added on a couple of rooms on one side, and another has put on two more and a pantry round the corner, and so on, till it is difficult to say exactly what type of dwelling it really is.

There is a proper front door somewhere about the place, only no one ever seems to find it; the path leading to it from the main gate unobtrusively hides itself among the fir-trees, wandering round at the rear of the house, and under some low apple-trees—of course, no one who wasn't familiar with the geography of the estate would think of exploring such an out-of-the-way, narrow, grass-grown trail. No, they would naturally follow along the irregularly-flagged broad path that is kept by the handy man fairly free from weeds (except some little ferns that will peep up at the edge, no matter what he does to them, and a saucy white violet that

has planted itself right in the very middle of the walk and blooms vigorously).

Along this path most people go, whether they carry their best sunshade, a bead bag and a silver card-case, or are merely delivering two half-pounds of butter done up in dock leaves, and a cream-coloured duck wrapped up in a coarse white tea-cloth with his liver tucked under his wing, a big bunch of fresh sage stuck in his mouth—"and, please, mother's put in a couple o' onions in case you didn't happen to have none."

This broad path leads to a corner in the architectural conglomeration where there are two doors at right angles—one moderately respectable and one smaller and shabbier. If you carry a silver card-case, you knock at the respectable-looking door—which promptly admits you into the scullery: if you are merely someone anxious to dispose of a few eggs or wanting to borrow a little flour, you knock more humbly at the shabby door—to find you are battering at the coal-house.

Abigail deals with callers according to their status: the silver card-cases are invited, in dulcet tones, to retrace their steps along the broad path and take the narrow one to the front door. Sometimes they do exactly as they are told; but more often, alas! they espy yet another door, which they promptly make for, and this one

precipitates them right into the living-room and on top of me, no matter what I may be doing.

Inside the cottage it is a similar jumble. You think you have found the living-room all right, when you come in from the garden, only to pull up in a large pantry, like a small room, with shelves full of delicious mysteries in glass jars and jampots and pickle bottles.

You open a door in the living-room, thinking it is the one leading out into the back hall, to find yourself confronted with a very steep and narrow stone staircase, which is one way of getting upstairs! Of course you get used to it all in a few days, and eventually cease to tumble down over the odd step that is obligingly placed here and there in dark spots, wherever the floor level changes in the halls or landings. But to those who are not native-born it is a wee bit confusing at first.

The living-room was originally the kitchen. It has a large fireplace with an oven, and wide hobs whereon you can stand a kettle or anything else you want to keep hot. It has a crane, too —only we daren't cook our dinner in a pot suspended from it, because I don't want Abigail to give notice. We have therefore to content ourselves with giving the crane an occasional swing.

The mantelpiece—of oak that is black with age—has two shelves, the upper one projecting beyond the lower, which has a frill of chintz beneath. Higher up still there is an ancient rack for holding a couple of guns, and there are cupboards on each side, also of black oak, that must have been put there when the house was built.

But I think the thing that delights my heart above everything else in this room is the huge dresser.

When you start with a room like this—I forgot to mention that there are oak rafters, with hooks for home-fed hams—it is easy to make it cosy. The big wooden settle keeps off draughts, some chairs that belonged to my great-grandparents are far more comfortable than anything I could buy nowadays, with the wood worn to that smooth polish that can only be attained by generations of handling.

The oak dower chest is heavily carved, though its iron hinges and locks suggest a prison door for solidity and size; still it is a handy receptacle for the miscellaneous collection of MSS. and papers that haunts me wherever I go!

I do not expect everybody to admire this style of room. There was one caller (who came out of sheer curiosity) who, after gazing around the living-room, with manifest disapproval, at last said, "You really could make this into quite a nice little drawing-room if you had those old

rafters and beams done away with, and a proper ceiling put. Then you could easily have a nice tiled modern stove in place of that dreadfully old-fashioned fireplace, with those great hobs. And if you moved the dresser into the kitchen, and——" So she went on, winding up with the encouraging assurance, "And you would hardly know the place when you had got it all done."

With one voice we said we could quite believe it.

People so often fail to realise that both a country cottage decked out in imitation of a town villa, and a town villa decked out in imitation of a country cottage, are equally unsatisfying. In each case the fake and insincerity of the schemes jar.

If it isn't bothering you too much, I should like you to look at the ornaments—these, as much as anything else, give the room its "unlikeness" to anything you see in the city. Here is a lovely fat fish in a glass case among reeds and grasses. On the walls are antlers of the fallow deer. Then there is a framed sampler, and likewise some wonderful needlework of a bygone age when needlework was an art.

On the mantelpiece shelves are china cottages and castles, an old china mill with a wonderful mill stream, on which are china ducks, each the size of the mill-wheel! Then Red Riding Hood,

in a little sprigged pinafore, carrying a dear little basket, and patting affectionately a most engaging, friendly-looking wolf, is always admired. Timothy's grandmother (a dignified-looking matron), teaching little Timothy out of the Bible, is a relic from the days when Scriptural subjects were among the ornaments found in most households. "Going to Market" and "Returning from Market" are a choice pair of china subjects, showing the lady riding behind her husband on a prancing steed that would do credit to Rotten Row.

Mary and her little Lamb is one of the prettiest in the collection, only she lost one of her arms over fifty years ago! There are various cows and sheep (some with blue ribbons round the neck), and other quaint china oddities.

Then there is a beautiful hen sitting on a most symmetrically woven (china) straw nest packed full of eggs (each one, in proportion to the hen, is the size of an ostrich egg). The hen (eggs and all) can be lifted up, using her head, poor thing, as the handle, and then you find she is the cover to an oval dish. I always intend—should any members of our Royal Family get stranded on these hills, and drop in unexpectedly to tea—to serve them with a poached egg in this identical dish.

And you must not overlook the shining brass candlesticks, some tall and stately, some squat,

with square trays and extinguishers, that have been winking and glinting in the light for a century now—and are still shining; nor the brass and horn lantern hanging from a beam. A lantern is an absolute necessity on these rugged hills when there is no moon.

How friendly the old brass things are! Just look at the warming-pan with its bright sun-face. I have no doubt modern radiators and hot-water pipes are a boon to those who do not mind headaches and dried-up air—but do they *look* as warm and comforting as the gleaming warming-pan?

That reminds me of the first time Abigail came down from London. She looked at the warming-pan with interest, as she had never seen one before. The weather was cold, and hot-water bottles were the order of the night in town.

When I returned from an evening stroll with some guests, she met me with an anxious face. "If you please, miss, will you kindly show me how you keep the water inside that warming-pan? I can't get it to stay inside nohow when I start to lift it!"

I wonder if you have ever seen a dresser like this one? The oak shelves forming the upper part are built into a deep recess in the wall, one above the other, up to the rafters, and all set

back in the thickness of the wall—and you can see how thick these walls are from the window-ledge, which is fifteen inches deep. But they need to be solid, for the winter storms that thrash across these hills show scant consideration for present-day building methods; and a modern "bijou bungalow" would probably be found scattered about the next parish, if it ever lived long enough to get its roof on!

The dresser is closely hung with jugs and mugs and cups, willow-pattern plates and dishes make a good deal of white and blue against the walls, which are a full buttercup yellow, while a collection of ancient china teapots, with some square willow-pattern vegetable dishes and a tall Stilton cheese dish with two big sunflowers on it, occupy the wider ledge at the bottom.

Here are some uncommon specimens of lustre jugs. This is a rare lustre mug, brown with green bars outside, and a purple band inside. A lustre pepper-box stands on one of the dresser ledges, and salt-cellars of glass, so heavy as to suggest paper-weights.

Do you know the fascination of old English mugs? On this dresser they range from a tiny mug in Rockingham ware, only an inch and a half high, to noble things that suggest long draughts of home-made herb beer! There are mugs with bunches of flowers on them, others with conventional bands or designs, some with

landscapes, some with butterflies, some with words of wisdom to be imbibed by the youthful along with the milk.

Jugs, again, are most alluring, once you get a mania for them ! One of my jugs is of brown earthenware, smothered with a raised design showing a trailing grape-vine, with big bunches of grapes here and there. Two other jugs that belonged to a bygone ancestress are apparently made of a white stone wall, with the most natural-looking ivy creeping up it and displaying bunches of berries. Jug-makers of the past gave so much interest to their goods by reason of this raised work, instead of being content to transfer a flat design as they do now. One white jug has off-standing deer around it, grazing among trees. Another has a hunt in full progress, horses and riders, dogs and all—though it always hurts me to see the running hare.

A real, proper dresser is a useful bit of furniture, provided it has plenty of hooks. It holds such a quantity of things. I have all sorts of odd cups and saucers on mine, relics of past treasures that have somehow survived the hand of the hired washer-up ; little bits that remind me of all sorts of pleasant things, such as tea-services my mother had when I was little, some that have belonged to other relatives.

In passing, I may say that a dresser of this sort is a great incentive to good works. Many a

relation, on looking at it, has said, "*I* have an old jug that belonged to your great, no, your great-great-aunt; I shall give it to you, as you like things of that sort."

Or another time it will be: "*What* a collection of odd cups! Good gracious, if a little thing like *that* amuses you, I'll turn out a lot I have stored away somewhere, glad to get rid of them; it only annoys me to look at them, as it reminds me how all the rest of the set got smashed. You can have them and welcome."

There has been a good deal of this sort of "give and take" about the furnishing of this cottage. And it is so much more interesting to me as the owner to know the history of the various items, than if I had merely bought antiques by the houseful, as I have known some people do. In the latter case, a room is so apt to look like nothing but an old curiosity shop; as it is, the things all seem to "belong," just as much as we do.

But I mustn't weary you with a catalogue of household furnishings, though I know, if you could actually *see* the china and the little bedrooms with white, washable handwork everywhere, and wonderful old patchwork and knitted quilts, you would love it all. The Bird room is the general favourite, with its unique crochet; there are swallows flying across the

curtain-tops, swans sailing among bulrushes on the washstand splash, wild geese flying above the tree-tops at another window, ducks swimming sedately along towel-ends, more swallows (in cross-stitch this time) on a table-cover, parrots (in darned filet) on the dressing-table cloth, while seagulls float along a frieze, a glass case of rare birds is over the mantelpiece, and a large wool-work pheasant, balancing itself ingeniously on the top of a small basket of grapes, and endeavouring to look as though it were quite its natural habitat, is framed, and hangs on the wall. I don't think the far-back relative who worked it had much of an eye for proportion, however!

On the mantelpiece stands a sedate row of china fowls, a marble fountain basin in the centre, with white pigeons basking around the edge.

Just one other room you must look into—the sitting-room, because I want you to see my dolls' things. Yes, I know it sounds imbecile, but I never had a dolls' house. When I was young, the rest of us were brothers, and it wasn't considered economical, therefore, to present a toy that would only be serviceable to one out of the bunch. Besides which, in those days children didn't immediately get what they stamped for. So I had to go without the thing I yearned for above all others. But you may be sure I took

care of what dolls' things did chance to come my way.

Dolls themselves were very scarce, but I had several sets of dolls' tea-things, given by discerning aunts, and here they are, in a funny old glass cupboard in the corner of the sitting-room. One is a very small set, with teeny pink rosebuds on it; another is a larger set, that my small friends drank tea out of (and occasionally smashed a cup for me). There are two dinner services, one in plain white—a round soup tureen, a gravy boat, a square vegetable dish, with some remaining plates and dishes; the other a gorgeous affair, with Dickens scenes on each plate—one dozen meat and six soup plates, with dishes and tureens galore, and oh! such lovely china soup and sauce ladles, all *en suite*.

These dolls' things seem to affect people in different ways. Some look at them with eyes that go back to their own childhood, and memories that recall similar treasures that they wanted when they, too, were little, and did—or did not—get. Such people know exactly why I value these things. They handle them lovingly, but don't say much.

But there are others who gaze at the dolls' china (and the little wooden animals, and the glass slipper I was certain Cinderella wore, and the china grand piano, and the dolls' brass fender, and all the other oddments), and then look at

me in blank astonishment. It is evidently incomprehensible to them that any sane woman, in these days of strenuous intellectuality, can hoard such childish rubbish. And I am powerless to explain my reasons.

Occasionally, however, light breaks across one of these amazed countenances, and a woman will suddenly exclaim: "*I* have part of a dolls' dinner service somewhere in the attic at home, I believe. I shall get it out, and put it in *my* china cabinet. It looks quite smart, doesn't it?"

To which I reply: "Yes; and I hear they are going to be *much* worn this season."

All the decorations in the house are on the most homely lines, one room has each deep window-ledge filled with seashells and coral. If you want silver boxes and cut-glass scent-bottles in the bedroom, you must bring them yourself. *We* think the wooden dressing-table looks all that can be desired, clothed in a blue-glazed lining petticoat, with white dotted muslin on top. And who could want a silver-backed hand-glass, when they have the chance of using one that has its back encrusted with small seashells!

There are plenty of pictures all over the house, many of them without frames. Haulage is an expensive matter on these hills, and we always take this into consideration. Several of the rooms have friezes made of brown paper, to

which have been affixed a series of coloured plates. The charm of this arrangement is that you can take down the old frieze and put up a new one—or stick a fresh picture over some old one—as often as you please.

All pictures, however, show beautiful views of outdoor scenery: heather-clad hills, flowering gardens, snow-covered peaks, and rolling waves. Whether they are original paintings that famous artists have given me, or plates from art magazines, they are all views of large spaces, and induce big, restful thoughts.

Some cards that hang on the bedroom walls have been singled out again and again by my friends for special commendation. I happened to see them one day when I was going round the Book Saloon of the R.T.S. in St. Paul's Churchyard. One special favourite has these lines on it (possibly you know them?):—

GOOD NIGHT.

Sleep sweet within this quiet room,
Oh thou! whoe'er thou art,
And let no mournful yesterday
Disturb thy peaceful heart;
Nor let to-morrow scare thy rest
With dreams of coming ill;
Thy Maker is thy changeless friend,
His love surrounds thee still.
Forget thyself and all the world,
Put out each feverish light;
The stars are watching overhead,
Sleep sweet, Good Night, Good Night.

Another, bought the same day, is entitled:—

A QUIET RESTING PLACE.

And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room;
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control,
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on every side,
The world that time and sense has known
Falls off and leaves us God alone.

For the Flower room, Canon Langbridge's delightful book, *Restful Thoughts for Dusty Ways*, supplied me with a verse:—

HEAVEN COVERS ALL.

When the world's weight is on thy mind,
And all its black-winged fears affright,
Think how the daisy draws her blind,
And sleeps without a light.

And for the Bird room, I have on the wall W. C. Bryant's beautiful poem, "Lines to a Waterfowl." You will remember these verses:—

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will lead my steps aright.

On more than one occasion visitors have thanked me for having left them these good-night thoughts.

Of course, being a cottage in the midst of a flower-patch, we never run short of flowers, and you find plenty indoors. When they are in bloom, however, I always like to put a bunch of white moss rose-buds (one of my favourite flowers) in a blue mug on a visitor's dressing-table.

But whatever the flowers, it is our custom to welcome all guests with rosemary, for I have discovered that the scent of it (even the sight of it) is a certain cure for the divers maladies caused by overdoses of unsatisfactory dressmakers, cooks who give notice every month, much boredom in crowded unventilated drawing-rooms, and all the many varieties of restlessness that have been invented to help women to kill time. It has also been known to prove efficacious in cases of people prone to overwork.

At any rate, if you come to visit me you will find a vase with sprigs of rosemary on the deep window-ledge in your room; and few of my friends go away without taking a slip from the gnarled bush by the door to plant in less congenial surroundings.

I believe Shakespeare said that rosemary typifies remembrance; Virginia unblushingly improves on Shakespeare by insisting that it means the remembrance of peace.

IV

Miss Quirker—Incidentally

EVERY visit to the cottage seems prefaced with a scramble. Either the work at the office suddenly does itself up in a tangle, or the domestic arrangements show signs of incipient paralysis, which it takes all my available energy to avert, or else it is people who inflict themselves upon me when I'm at my final gasp without a moment, or a single company smile, to spare for anybody. And of all the three forms of irritation, the uninvited people are the worst; for they always seem to absorb the last bit of vitality left me, which I had hoped would just carry me over the journey.

There is Miss Quirker, for instance. You don't know Miss Quirker? How I envy you!

I can best describe her as a lady well over forty (or more), who apparently hasn't anything at all to do, and who does it thoroughly well. She has a couple of very decided and conspicuous gifts—one is the ability to waste the time and dissipate the amiable qualities of every individual whose path she crosses; and the other is a positive genius for saying the wrong thing.

I was near the window writing for all I was worth, when she knocked at the door and inquired

for me, adding, "I see she is busy writing, but if you tell her who it is, I know she'll see *me*." Of course I had to see her.

She entered the room with a kittenish little rush and scuffle, that is by no means the happiest form of affectation for a tall, largely-built woman well over forty (or more).

"Ah! I've found you in at last" (with a roguish wag of a stiff finger in a size too small glove). "I was determined to see you, dear, though Abigail always looks so forbidding at the door. I met Miss Virginia shopping just now, and I asked if you were at home. She said you were *frightfully* busy, nearly off your head with work, as you were leaving town the first thing in the morning. So I said at once: Then of course I must go round and call on her this very afternoon.

"She said she wasn't sure that you'd be in if I did, but I said I should chance it—it's such an age since we've met—why, not since your engagement was announced! Now, just give me an account of yourself, and tell me all about everything.

"I would have asked Miss Virginia, but I never think she is at all cordial, or perhaps I should say—sympathetic. Indeed, I don't think she really knew me at first. I was right in her path, yet she seemed to look through me! But I took a seat next to her at the lace counter,

and spoke to her. By the way, is she deaf? It was so strange that she didn't seem to hear a quarter of the questions I asked her about you, so I really got next to *no* information from her. It was so funny sometimes that I almost laughed —I've *such* a sense of humour, you know. For instance, when I asked her what she thought of your *fiancé* (you know you've never introduced me to him yet!) and was it her idea of a suitable match, and was he tall or short, she replied: 'I think it wonderful value considering, and it should wear well; the size is five yards round, so I had better have six yards to allow for corners.' And, do you know, I was some minutes before I realised that she wasn't talking about his waist measure, but an afternoon tea-cloth for which she was buying the lace. She evidently hadn't heard a word I had said. And so I raised my voice and asked her what part he had come from, as I knew he didn't go to *our* church. She just looked at me and replied: 'Cluny; I always think Cluny lace washes so well, don't you?'

"You see, I got absolutely *nothing* out of her. In fact, I wondered, dear, whether—of course, I know you don't mind *me* speaking quite frankly —whether there had been any little rift—er—you understand; of course I know you've a wonderful fund of patience, only those two girls always seem to be with you, and though I'm sure you wouldn't tell them so, yet anyone with

the very *slightest* tact might see that they aren't wanted. And of course . . . .

"Oh, well, I'm glad to hear you *do* think as much of them as ever. I shouldn't have thought it; but you needn't mind telling *me* if there *had* been a little coolness. I'm fairly sharp at seeing through a stone wall. And I always have said that—personally, mind you—I never knew two girls less . . . .

"Of course, we won't discuss them if you'd rather not. As you know, I am the very last one to want to introduce a disagreeable topic. We'll talk about you. Turn round to the light, and let me see how you are looking. My *dear!* but you do look ill!! I don't know *when* I've seen you look so utterly washed out and anæmic. . . .

"You never felt better in your life? Well, I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure. Oh, I see what it is, it's that blue dress you are wearing that gives you that aged and sallow look—a very trying colour, isn't it? I don't think anyone ought to wear that colour, but those with very clear young-looking complexions, and then it looks charming. It always suited me. By the way, did Madame Delphine make that dress? . . . I thought so, I knew it the minute I saw you. It's a queer thing, but I have never yet seen anyone look even passable in a dress that she has made. You can't exactly say that it doesn't

fit, can you? It's a something—I don't know how to express it—about her gowns that always strikes me as—well, you know what I mean, don't you? And that dress you've got on looks just like that! I know you won't mind *me* speaking quite plainly; you see, I've known you for so long, and I'm not one to flatter, I never was. What we need in this world is absolute sincerity; don't you agree with me? And I always think it's the kindest thing when you see a friend in anything that makes her look plainer than ever, to tell her so at once, then she knows just exactly what she looks like. And, after all, other people are the best judges as to what suits us. We can't see ourselves. Mrs. Ridley was saying at the Guild 'At Home' at the Archdeacon's the other day, she thought you were so wise to stick to that way you do your hair; she said she thought it suited you, considering that . . . ."

Here I did manage to interpolate a sarcastic regret that they couldn't find a more interesting topic of conversation!

"Oh, yes, we *had* other more interesting things to talk about, dear, but Mrs. Archdeacon had your photo on the table, and the Archdeacon said something about you, I forget what—nothing of any importance—and that was the only reason we mentioned you. I said I thought perhaps you did it that way because it was a little thin

just there. . . . Oh, I know you used to have a lot of hair, dear; but some people's hair *does* come out, and a pad doesn't look so well anywhere else. . . .

"It's all your own hair? You don't wear—— Well, I *am* surprised! I should *never* have thought it!! I don't mean that it looks much in any case, but I always concluded that you wore——

"Oh, how delightful! I'll confess I was longing for a cup of tea. . . . Yes, three lumps and plenty of milk. I always say it makes up for any deficiencies in the tea, if one has lots of milk. . . . China tea, is it? I thought so. I dare say it's all right for those who like it. And, of course, if you tell people what it is, they understand why it *looks* so poor. . . .

"On *no* account; don't *think* of having some Indian tea made specially for me. I can quite well make this do, because I'm going straight home after I leave you, and tea will be waiting for me, and I shall have a *good* cup first thing. . . .

"Yes, I think I will have another sandwich, even though it is the third time of asking. These make me think of the Guild 'At Home' last week. You ought to have been there. The Archdeacon makes such a delightful host *and* the sandwiches!—well, I can't *tell* you what they were like; literally hundreds and hundreds of

them, and such delicious filling; all cut in their own kitchen, too. You really should get Mrs. Archdeacon to tell you what her cook put in them; you'd never touch one of these ordinary ones again, once you had tasted hers.

"But what I *would* like to know is, what does she do with all the crusts? Mrs. Ridley thought that perhaps they made them up into savoury puddings; only, as I said to her: How about those with fish in them? She said that perhaps they kept them separate when cutting; but I know the shuffling ways of cooks better than that! I never kept one, and I never will. . . .

"I must certainly try the cake if you made it yourself. I seldom get time to do any cooking myself, though I'm a very good hand at cakes. But you've secretaries to take everything off your hands; you must have lots of spare time."

(A moment's pause while she tries the cake.)

"Have you ever used the Busy Bee Flour Sifter? No? Then I should strongly advise you to get one. I should think *that* might help you to make a lighter cake; or do you think you put in enough baking powder? But there, some people have a light hand with cakes, and some haven't. I don't think anything makes any difference if you haven't. It's just like plants, isn't it—they always grow well for those who love them. *Your* ferns aren't looking very bright, are they? . . .

"Oh, don't you like the ends of the fronds rubbed? . . . I see, they were given you by your *fiancé*, and naturally they are the apple of your eye. That reminds me, you haven't shown me his portrait yet. I'm longing to see it. . . .

"Is *that* the gentleman! Well! he's the very last man in the world I should have chosen for you! Not a bit like what I pictured. . . .

"No, I don't mean that there's anything *wrong* with him, only—er—he doesn't look a scrap like the man *you* would become engaged to. . . .

"Well, I don't know that I can exactly describe the type of man I expected. I thought he would be tall and——

"He is? Over six feet? Well, he doesn't look it from his photo, does he? . . .

"That's true; a vignetted head doesn't show the full height. But apart from that, I expected an artistic sort of man. . . .

"He is? Really! And then I should have pictured him rather—er—well, Napoleonic, and with that far-away poetic fire in his eyes that carries you off your feet to untold heights. . . .

"No, of course I don't mean an aviator! I mean a—but it isn't easy to put it into words; only you can't think how disap—how surprised I am to see a little man. . . .

"Of course, I remember you did say he was tall and well made. But there, handsome is as

handsome does; and, after all, I've heard that it is often the plainest and most uninteresting-looking men that turn out the best in the end. I can only hope that it will be so in your——

"Why, I declare! Here's Miss Virginia! How d'y'do? We've been talking about you all the afternoon. Well, I really *must* be going, and I simply won't listen to any of your persuasions to stay longer. I've brightened her up nicely, Miss Virginia; she was looking ever so gloomy when I called. Good-bye, dear. *Good-bye, Miss Virginia.*"

Exit Miss Quirker.

What we said after she had gone had better not be recorded! My own remarks may not have been *quite* cordial; but I know that Virginia's were even worse—if that were possible.

But though visitations such as these, when bestowed upon me at the eleventh hour, always reduce me mentally to a sort of bran-mash (and Virginia says she can't see why anybody need bother a government to *import* pulp nowadays, considering the state of her brain, to say nothing of those of other people who shall be nameless), the sight of the garden makes me human once more, and by sunset the silence of the hills has so restored my soul that the sun seldom, if ever, goes down upon my wrath.

After tea, there will probably be two hours

of daylight for watering the garden. Even though the sun has dropped behind the opposite hills, it is light up here on the hill-top long after the valley has gone to sleep; and when the sun has really set, there is a long and lovely twilight.

Indoors and out there is absolute peace. The grandfather's clock ticks with that slow deliberation that is so soothing; even the preliminary rumble it gives before striking is never irritating—you feel it is a concession due to advanced age.

Through the open window float in the scents of thousands of flowers that are feeling unspeakably grateful for the liberal watering the girls have been giving them; you cannot distinguish any one in particular; one moment you think it is the sweet briar, then you are sure it is the white lilies, then the breeze brings the breath of the honeysuckles that are climbing trees and hedges, till the whole air is laden with perfume.

Up the garden white dresses are seen among the borders.

"There, I believe we've done everything but that upper bed of hollyhocks, and they won't hurt for to-night." Virginia sounds as though she had been working hard.

"Now the tent," calls out Ursula. And we all make a stampede to the bottom of the lower orchard, and with a few dexterous turns the tent is down and folded up; for though the trees

may be motionless now, the wind springs up at any moment on these hills, and once you hear it soughing in the tops of the big fir-trees in the garden you will realise the advantage of having the tent indoors !

As you saunter up the garden, back to the house, crushing the sweet-odoured black peppermint in the grass underfoot, the stars seem very near. The cottage looks like a toy, with the light shining from each little window. And as you cross the threshold into the living-room, the log fire flashes and gleams (a fire is acceptable up here after sundown, even in the summer), and everything smiles with such a cosy welcome till brass candlesticks and cups and jugs and the homely willow patterns on the dresser, all seem to say, " We are so glad you've come."

V

The Geography of the Flower-Patch

The first night at this cottage you may lie awake, if you are a stranger to these hills, almost awed by the silence. Gradually you realise that the silence is not actual absence of sound. In May and early June the nightingales trill in the trees around; or you will hear the owls calling to one another in the woods—a trifle weird if you do not know what it is. At another time it is the corn-crake; or the wind brings you the bleating of lambs down in the valley. As you listen longer, you hear the tinkle, tinkle of the little spring that tumbles out of a small spout into a ferny well outside the garden gate.

You take a final look out of the window to where, miles away in the distance, a lighthouse flashes at fixed intervals. It seems strangely companionable, even though it is so far off. And then you close your eyes—unconscious that you have fallen asleep—only to open them again in a minute, as you think. Someone is speaking.

You detect Ursula's voice in a stage whisper through the keyhole.

"I say—aren't you ever going to get up?"

You rub your eyes. It certainly is morning! And you such a poor sleeper, possibly one of those who "never had a wink of sleep all night,

and such horrid dreams." The plaintive voice continues at the keyhole :

" I planted out nine hundred and thirty-seven wallflower seedlings yesterday, and I want to cover them up with fern before the sun gets too strong. If you'll get up you can gather the bracken, while I creep around on all fours covering them up. See ? Virginia is busy thinning out the turnips. And SHE is never any good at getting up early, you know ! "

I regret to say this last scornful reference is to me !

And now when you look out of the little bedroom window again, to the accompaniment of an early cup of tea, what a change has taken place since yesterday ! Last night the ranges of opposite hills, with the sun setting behind them, looked vague and mysterious with shadows. This morning the sun is full on them, but now there is another mystery—or so it seems to those who see it for the first time.

Instead of looking down into the green tree-clad valley to where the river winds along at the base of the steep hills, you now look down on to a bank of solid white—the mist that rises up at night and fills the lower part of the valley, reminding one of the mist that went up from the earth in the first Garden, " and watered the whole face of the ground."

With the sun on it, the mist gives back a dazzling light. And then slowly, slowly, the whole white bank in the valley lifts silently and wonderfully; up and up it goes in a solid mass, and as the higher parts of the hills, which were previously in sunshine, are temporarily hidden by the uprising mass, so the lower part of the valley gradually becomes visible, first only a strip at the very bottom, then more and more as the white curtain is raised. Finally the white mass disappears and joins its fellows in the sky above, a fragment of cloud lingering sometimes a little below the summit of the highest hill. If the day is going to be fine, this last trail of silvery cloud disappears, and then the sun lights up the woods and the upland meadows, showing you distant cottages and far-off farmhouses where you saw nothing but tremulous shadows the night before.

However often one looks upon this sight, the marvel never lessens, and the "simple scientific explanation," which every learned person who visits this cottage pours over the breakfast-table, is quite unnecessary. Scientific explanations are admirable for cities, but when we set foot on these hills, it is just sufficient for us that Nature "is."

One drawback about this cottage is the fact that one's poetic thoughts and soulful dreams

are constantly being interrupted by things material, more especially those appertaining to food! And even as you are gazing out of the window at the glorious scenery all around you, there arises the odour of frizzling ham (that originally ran about, uncooked, in a field lower down), fried potatoes (the good old-fashioned sort done in the frying-pan), coffee, and other hungry things; and you find to your surprise that a substantial breakfast is on the table by eight o'clock, though (and this is where guests bless their hostess) no one need get up to breakfast, if they prefer to have it in bed, for very tired people come here sometimes.

But it does not matter what nervous wrecks Virginia and Ursula may have landed at the door overnight, the first morning sees them up with the lark and out gardening; and one of the earliest sounds you hear is the clink of the brown pitcher on the stones, as Virginia sets it down after filling it at the little spring outside the garden gate. This is a thirsty garden; it is everywhere on the slope, remember, and is composed of the lightest soil imaginable with rock everywhere beneath. As fast as you put water on it, it runs away downhill; hence, a moment's leisure, morning or evening, always means some pitchers of water for the garden.

All the cottages on the hillside seem to have been built in the same way. Someone evidently

hunted about for a few feet of land where it was slightly less sloping than the rest, and within reach of a spring of water, and this plot he levelled a bit by excavating the big boulders and smaller stones which make up our substratum, and often the top-stratum too. Then if the piece of land wasn't quite large enough, he cut away part of the hill behind, banking it up with some of the biggest of the boulders, to keep it from tumbling down on to the piece he had cleared.

Next he excavated more rocky pieces from the up-and-down land around his clearing; this gave him a bit of clean ground for a garden, and also provided him with enough stone to build his habitation. Any stone he might have over he made into a wall around his plot, by the simple process of piling one piece on top of another. That, apparently, is all man does to the place. Then Nature sets to work; and, oh, what festoons of loveliness she flings over all!

As several different owners have had a hand at my particular cottage, the garden has been extended in various directions, but always requiring stone walls to prop it up. Hence you get a moderately level patch, with a drop of four or six feet over the edge of the garden-bed.

A few rough stone steps take you down to the next level, where there is another bit of garden, the steps themselves sprouting in every chink, with wild strawberry, primroses, ferns,

columbines, and a stray Canterbury bell. In this way the cottage is surrounded with steps going up or going down, with a flower-bed running along here, and some more a few feet lower down; another terrace of flowers and some more steps (nearly smothered with big periwinkle, these are) take you down to an absurd lawn, that some enterprising person levelled up so delightfully on the tilt that neither chair nor table will remain where you place it! If they roll far enough, they go over the edge of the lawn, a drop of about twenty feet, into the lower orchard! Nevertheless, this lawn is popular, because it is edged at one side with white and pink moss rose-trees.

Thus perhaps you can picture it—big beds and little beds, some running one way, some spreading out in another direction; sometimes large patches where flowers grow by the quarter-acre; sometimes little scraps and corners no bigger than a hearth-rug, where we managed to dig out some more stones, and make a further bit of clearing. But everywhere you go there are the big plateaux or little terraces supported by massive grey stone walls, which vary from two to twenty feet in height, according to the amount of hillside they are required to prop up.

And how these walls bloom! Ivy and moss and ferns seem to love them, for all the local walls

sprout ferns without any apparent provocation, and the walls about this garden are no exception.

But, in addition, white arabis hangs over in cascades, in the spring, and you see then why the country people call it "Snow-on-the-Mountains"; and mingling with the white is the exquisite mauve variety; wallflowers of lovely colouring, rose pink, deep purple, pale primrose, bright orange, as well as the richly-streaked brown-and-yellow flowers, bloom gaily on the rocky ledges; snapdragons flower later, with nasturtiums, and even some blue-eyed forget-me-nots have sown themselves up there, and bloom with the rest. Honesty plants have established themselves in the crevices; masses of wild Herb Robert have been allowed to remain; and carpeting everything are all manner of sedums, and Alpine and ice plants, some with grey-green foliage and ruby-coloured stems, some with white flowers, some with crimson; and in the hottest places there are clumps of houseleeks looking sturdy and homely.

Certain weeks in the year the tops of some of the walls are a golden mass when the yellow stonecrop is in bloom; but whatever the season, there is always something to look at—something holding up a brave head and preaching as loudly as ever a plant can preach of the advantages of making the best of your surroundings.

Does the wall face a sunless north? Very

well; out come the ferns and up creeps the ivy; the Rock Stonecrop, with its blue-green stems and leaves (looking almost like a huge moss) fills every shady spot it can find, seemingly appearing from nowhere.

Is the wall sunny? All right; the wallflowers laugh at you, pinks climb over the top edge, just to see what is going on down below; one baking spot supports a mass of sage about a yard and a half in diameter, a smother of blue flowers in the summer; no one planted it, it just came! A red ribis has hooked itself in at one spot; what it lives on I don't know; while white, mauve and purple Honesty seeds itself everywhere, making a brave show of colour in the spring. In fact, white and mauve are the prevailing colours on the walls in April.

Later on you may expect—and will find—anything; for annuals and bi-annuals seed themselves, continually dropping the seed to a lower level; hence there is always a self-planted garden bed at the base of each wall, reminiscent of what was growing above the season before.

On the shady side of one wall, we have made a moss garden—it was Virginia's idea, and she takes a very special pride in it, adding new sorts whenever she finds them. Hence you will sometimes find her coming home from a ramble, carrying a huge stone with her, or lugging along a veritable boulder. In this way she brings the

moss home, local habitation and all, annexing any stone she sees (a wild stone, of course, not a tame one from someone's garden wall) that bears a promising crop of some new variety.

As a result, she fairly bulges with pride whenever she exhibits the moss garden, and explains how much of it is her own particular handiwork.

We have not yet settled whether she ought to pay me rent for my wall that she uses for her moss garden, or I ought to pay her wages for moss-gardening my wall.

One characteristic of this garden is an ever-changing show of colour. It varies according to the season, but whatever the time of year there are usually gorgeous splashes of colour that make you stand and wonder.

Do not forget that this is only a cottage garden, even though it is a roomy one. I hope you are not picturing to yourself an orthodox country-house garden, with expanses of well-kept lawns, with proper-looking beds of geraniums, and lordly pampas grass at intervals, and well-groomed rose-bushes in tidy beds, and correct herbaceous borders, and beds of begonias and heliotropes planted out from the greenhouses, and all the other nice-mannered, polite flowers that every well-paid, certificated gardener conscientiously insists on planting in exactly the same way all the country over.

This garden grows a little of everything, and

a great deal of some things, and when you look at it you might easily imagine that everything had planted itself just where it pleased. The garden is not tidy, for the things are constantly growing over each other, and then out across the paths. Moreover, it lacks someone there all the time to keep it tidy; the ministrations of the handy man are decidedly erratic. But at least it is bright, always bright, and you can pick as many flowers as you please—handfuls, armfuls, apronfuls—with no fear of an autocratic gardener glaring at you; and the flowers will never be missed.

In the spring wallflowers predominate, every colour that the modern varieties produce. Ursula's remark that she had planted over nine hundred seedlings was well within the mark. A thousand or two of wallflower seedlings do not go very far in this garden, because at one time of the year the place appears to be a waving mass of wallflowers from end to end.

And have you any idea what the scent is like when you have thousands of wallflowers smiling on a sunny spring morning?

But there are all sorts of oddments, some things you do not expect and some things you do. The cowslip bed is very pretty. Here are yellow, orange, copper-coloured and mahogany brown cowslips; pale-coloured oxlips, and polyanthuses in as many shades as the wallflowers,

from rosy red to dark purple-brown with every petal edged with bright yellow as though they had been buttonholed round.

There is no need to cultivate primroses in the garden beds, for the two orchards are thick with them; where there are also large patches of wild snowdrops with crowds of wild daffodils, and dancing wind-flowers—or wood anemones; while tall spikes of the pale mauve spotted orchises grow in the grass around the edge near the walls.

Before the wallflowers have finished flowering the tulips are out, the old-fashioned "cottage tulips," many of them, tall and with large cup-like flowers—pink and crimson, brown and yellow, showy "parrots," and delicate mauve feathered with white, purple-black, deep maroon; such a brilliant army those tulips make, with hundreds of them in bloom at once.

Before the tulip petals have fallen, the peonies have opened out great heavy heads of flowers that can't keep upright. The scarlet oriental poppies with their blue-black centres make masses of colour that have to be kept very much to themselves or they kill every other flower within reach; these are therefore planted near the clumps of white irises, and the deep blue and pure white perennial lupins, that make a beautiful show all down one border.

Speaking of lupins reminds me of the tree-lupins. Virginia brought some harmless-looking

little plants with her one year, remembering my love for lupins.

"These are tree-lupins," she said. "I'm sure I don't know what they will grow into, but the man said they were just like lupins, only much more so; therefore I bought them. Don't blame *me* if they die."

She planted them comfortably and cosily in a bed along with white foxgloves and pink pentstemons, all the members of this happy family looking about the same size.

The following year when Virginia visited the cottage she asked, "Where are my tree-lupins?" She was shown great bushes each the size of a round dining-table, and each holding aloft hundreds of yellow spikes, and filling the air with the scent of a bean-field. There were the tree-lupins all right! But where were the foxgloves and pentstemons?

Perhaps you think there must be large, dull spaces when the wallflowers cease blooming, but in between the wallflower plants are others coming on, and by the time the wallflowers have finished—and are ready to be pulled up—these beds are filling with sweet williams and snapdragons. The young plants were there, and they come into bloom as the wallflowers finish. And then, where only a short time before there were beds all purples and yellows and browns,

you have now reds and pinks and every shade of rosy tint that the bright eyes of the sweet williams can produce.

The snapdragons once played a joke on the garden. I was ordering some seeds from Sutton's, and said, "I want some very hardy snapdragons, that will stand being planted in the windiest part of the garden where nothing of any height will grow." The seeds were guaranteed to grow in the most uprooting of hurricanes.

In due time the seedlings appeared above ground, and Ursula devoted several back-aching evenings to planting them out into the wind-swept beds. By the middle of the following summer those jaunty snapdragons had each grown six feet high, and there, waving in that exposed place, where any well-conducted plant would have sternly refused to grow more than a foot high, was a plantation of great flowers, each tied to a stout stake like hollyhocks, and the blooms seemed to have outgrown their normal size just as the rest of the plants had done.

Of course, people came from ever so far to gaze at these snapdragons; and unbelievers surreptitiously pulled out tape-measures and two-foot rules, and one and all, after meditating seriously on the subject, and looking at it from all points of view, would finally shake their heads and say, "Well, I'll just tell you what it is—the

place evidently suits them." We never got any further than that!

By every law and reason known to properly-trained gardeners and horticulturists, this garden ought to be able to produce nothing but low-growing flowers and shrubs. Every local resident kindly volunteered this information directly he or she set eyes on the cottage; they said it was too high up, too bleak in winter, too exposed, too dry, too rocky, or too glaringly sunny—for anything above six inches high to have a chance in it.

And yet Nature goes on laughing at the pessimists, and so do those who tend this flower-patch. And the columbines, yellow, pink, pale blue, purple, and white, send up tall heads of flower. The coreopsis plants grow so big and bushy they have to be staked. The cornflowers, a streak of blue at the end of the cabbage bed, are taller than the broad beans adjoining. Then there are the hollyhocks and the larkspurs—these hold their heads as high as anyone could desire, and the tall red salvias are not far behind. The foxgloves are also a brave sight (though I do not include in this category those that are buried under the tree-lupins!).

Of course, there are low-growing things in the garden as well as the more lofty-minded. There is one bed that is a ramping mass of giant mimulus of various colours. Convolvulus minor

spreads about the ground in one of the white lily beds; and eschscholtzias cover the earth for another row of lilies. Pansies rove about at their own sweet will in this garden, and the old-fashioned white pinks and the pink variety spread themselves out over the big stones that edge the borders.

The mignonette bed has a row of lavenders at the side, and mounds of nasturtiums grow where the earth is too rocky and barren to support anything else.

Naturally, there are hedges of sweet peas; sometimes they are heavy with flowers, sometimes the slugs or birds settle the matter at the beginning of the season. One hedge runs along at the back of the herb garden, and the herbs have so spread themselves out that the sweet peas were getting swamped. Virginia has been cutting them back.

Do you know what the scent of cut herbs is like on a hot summer day, with sweet peas in the background? In this herb garden there is sage, with its lovely blue flowers, lemon thyme, silver thyme, savory, hyssop, lavender, rosemary, rue, balm, marjoram, black peppermint, spearmint and parsley.

In this bed also grows the old-time bergamot, with its heavily-scented leaves and lovely tufts of crimson flowers.

But though one part of the garden is set

apart for herbs and another for vegetables, you must not imagine that they are only to be found there. Fine clumps of parsley have planted themselves in among the annual larkspurs; mint persists in running riot among the pink and white mallows (but the mint family never remains quietly at home); a sturdy scarlet runner comes up, year after year, beside a great bush of gum cistus, which makes me think it might be treated as a perennial; it seems impossible to get the artichokes to part company with the Michaelmas daisies, while raspberry canes shoot up among the old-fashioned red fuchsia bushes; radishes are flourishing like the green bay-tree underneath the sweetbriar; a regiment of pickling onions is living on most neighbourly terms with a row of cup-and-saucer Canterbury bells; and as for rhubarb—well, what can you expect when one man, whom I employed for a brief spell, remarked:

"You'll see where I've put in that thur special rubbub, miss, because I've planted a traveller's joy a-top of he to mark the spot."

Cupid's Border is another section of this garden that may interest you. Here you naturally find Love-in-a-mist and Love-lies-bleeding. The flowers which the country folks call Love-lockets dangle pink and white from their graceful curving stems; (alas, in catalogues and places

where they know, this plant is merely regarded as dielytra). In this border you of course find forget-me-nots "that grow for happy lovers"; bachelor's buttons, too, hold up their heads in a very sprightly manner, and please notice that they are getting nearer and nearer to the clump of Sweet Betsy. But the bachelor's buttons have a rival, for the other side of Sweet Betsy stands lad's love—and though not so showy as the bachelor's buttons, lad's love claims to be of more solid worth. I leave them to settle the matter between themselves, however; I'm not one to interfere in such affairs.

At the other side of the border stands a maiden's blush rose, and gallantly waving beside it is a clump of Prince's Feather (sometimes referred to in common parlance as "they laylock bushes"). At the edge of the border you naturally find heartsease, not the stiff, over-developed article of modern flower-shows, but the old-fashioned sort, all streaks and splashes of rich purple and yellow.

There is no time now to go round the vegetable garden—not that this can be regarded as an entirely separate part of the estate, for the vegetables have got mixed up in a terribly haphazard way with the rest of things, as I hinted just now. The potato-plot, for instance, has a border of golden wallflowers all round and double daisies at the edge, with a row of giant

sunflowers, hollyhocks, and clumps of honesty at the back.

This mixture is partly in the nature of a compromise. The gentleman who wields the spade has to be taken into account. No matter who he is, no matter how often he discharges me and I have to beg yet someone else to "oblige" me, it is always the same, the tiller of the soil regards space given over to flowers as a grievous waste, not to say an indication of feeble-mindedness! Therefore he inserts a row of vegetables or seeds whenever I happen to have cleared out some flowering plants and left a morsel of space *pro tem.* It seems a prevailing idea among the non-qualified working classes, in rural districts, that the cultivation of flowers ranks about on a level with doing the washing—work derogatory to a man and only fit for women!

To the credit of the handy man I must say that on one occasion he did kindly present me with a load of pig manure. He put it on the flower garden the day before we arrived, as a pleasant surprise, which it certainly was! Next day we all had relatives with broken legs, who needed our immediate return to town.

Nevertheless the vegetables play their part, and assume no small importance, in due course; for it is another unwritten law of this cottage

that visitors shall go out and select the day's vegetables, and cut them with the dew on; of course, if they are superlatively lazy, they can meanly get some early riser to do it for them; also they can confer together, or each can gather her own choice.

Hence you will see Virginia or Ursula in a large hat that is all brim, with basket on arm, and wearing an apron (not a lacy, frilly muslin thing, but a good-sized, well-made, old-fashioned lilac print apron), going up the garden and gathering broad beans, cutting young cauliflowers, or "curly greens," or turnip tops, or a marrow, forking up potatoes, pulling carrots, collecting lettuces, spring onions, cress and other salading—all according to the season.

And if it should chance that you have never yourself put on a big apron, and cut your own vegetables before the dew is off them, then Virginia will be truly sorry for you.

There is plenty of time to be lazy, however; and a hot summer day means long leisure in this garden; for when the sun is high the brown pitcher rests (though the brown teapot does not) until the fir-trees throw shadows from the west.

All day you can sit in the shade at the bottom of the garden, looking up the hill at the wonderful mass of colour before you. Along the ridge of the cottage roof perches a row of

swallows, chirping and chattering in their usual way. The starlings, who have built under the tiles, are ordering their respective families to cease clamouring for more, explaining that hunting caterpillars is hot work. Most other birds are quiet when the sun is fiercest, but over all the garden there is the hum, hum of thousands of industrious bees, while literally hundreds of white butterflies keep up a perpetual flutter over the tall blue spikes of bloom on the lavender bushes.

Even the small white dog with the brown ears ceases to tear about the garden, and bark at nothing in a consequential way; he just lies down on the edge of somebody's dress, and hangs out a little pink tongue for air.

This is the time when the flower-patch among the hills spells REST.

An old woman passing up the lane a few nights ago paused at the gate. "How them pinnies do blow, miss!" she said, gazing admiringly at a clump of peonies. Then she added—

"Ain't it strange, now, that it do take a woman to make a flower garden? A man ain't no good at that; he simply can't help hisself a-running to veg'tables!"

But after thinking this over, and despite all that strong-minded womankind tells me to the contrary, I cannot really believe that there is such total depravity in the other sex!

VI

That Jane Price!

WHEN Abigail announced, "Mrs. Price says can you spare a minute to see her, please, ma'am," you would have known by the toss of her nose that the lady-caller was not very *nearly* related to the aristocracy.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Price, or "that Jane Price," as she is more usually styled, is held in no great esteem in our village. Yet everything is said to fulfil some useful purpose, and if Mrs. Price does nothing else, at least she and her family serve as conspicuous moral warnings and give us something to throw up our hands about at intervals, when we exclaim:

"*Did* you EVER!!"

She is a widow of ample and well-fed proportions, owning her cottage, some bees and a pig, and apparently getting a fairly good living out of doing remarkably little sewing. If, under a mistaken sense of duty, you strive to encourage local industry, and seek to engage her services, she has to consider before she consents to undertake the bit of sewing you offer her to do, at three times the amount you would have to pay for having it done in town. And as often as not she replies that she "really *can't* oblige you" this time, as she's got a "spell" on cruel bad,

that has gone all down her back to her knees, making her head feel nohow.

You turn away not even worried about her condition, since she seems as cheerful as a daisy and as comfortably complacent as a cow. And you also know, even though you may have been acquainted with the lady only a few months, that however cruel the spell may be, and however long it may last and prevent her working, her children will be some of the most elaborately dressed in the Sunday school, and from the cottage door there will radiate the most appetising of odours as regularly as the mealtimes come round.

How it is that she manages to do so well with so little visible means of subsistence, only a stranger would stop to inquire. The residents know only too well that her pockets are large; that the shawl she invariably wears on weekdays has voluminous folds; that her carrying and stowing-away capacity is almost worthy of a professional conjurer. Kleptomania (to give it as refined a name as we can) is her besetting sin. Unfortunately her family follow in her footsteps

Mrs. Price seems to have a positive gift for turning everything to profitable account; and her methods of raising money are as ingenious as they are varied.

Knowing her idiosyncrasies, I asked Abigail where she was at the moment.

"In the kitchen, sitting in my wicker easy-chair," Abigail replied, still with elevated nose. "She just walked right in and plumped herself down."

Whereupon I indicated, by dumb pantomime, that she was on no account to be left there without personal oversight; and Abigail intimated, by means of nods and becks and wreathèd scowls, that she was keeping her left eye on the visitor, over her shoulder, even while she was talking to me. We both knew that all was fish that came to Mrs. Price's net, and she would negotiate with absolute impartiality a piece of soap, a duster, or a half-crown, should they lie in her way.

Not long before, Miss Bretherton, the Rector's niece, a middle-aged lady who keeps house for him, had tried to give one of the Price girls—Esmeralda by name—a good start in life, taking her into the rectory kitchen. But things disappeared with such alarming rapidity during the first month she was in residence, that she had to be sent back home again.

She left on a Saturday after middle-day dinner. In the afternoon the house was observing the all-pervading quiet that was customary on Saturdays while the Rector was in his study preparing for Sunday.

Miss Bretherton, requiring something in the

dining-room that adjoined the study, went in on tiptoe so as not to disturb him, when, to her amazement, she came upon the discharged Esmeralda sitting on the floor beside an open sideboard cupboard where some jars of pickles were stored, ladling out pickled walnuts as fast as she could into one of the maternal pudding basins. Seeing Miss Bretherton, she just picked up her basin, walnuts and all, and hastily retired the same way that she had come, through the French window.

Now, obviously her ex-mistress—over fifty years of age and liable to rheumatism—couldn't chase after her in house-slippers and minus a bonnet, seeing it was raining; so the bereft lady just closed the sideboard door and communed with her own feelings, womanfully stifling her desire to burst into the study and tell the Rector about it, even though it was his Saturday silence time.

Next morning, Sunday, just as she was buttoning her gloves, preparatory to crossing the rectory lawn by the short cut to the church, the cook came to her with the agitated inquiry: Had the mistress done anything with the leg of mutton left by the butcher yesterday morning?

No, of course not! Why should she? etc.

Well, they hunted high and they hunted low, and the church bell gave its final peremptory clang when they were still hunting, but no leg

of mutton was found either in the master's boot-cupboard, or under the bed in the spare room, or in the bookcase in the library, or in the wood-shed, or in any other of the equally likely places which they searched. Indeed, no one had ever expected that it would be found once its absence was discovered; they just looked darkly at each other and murmured, "That Esmeralda, of course." Cook declares that her mistress added "the good-for-nothing baggage" under her breath; but I can't credit that of Miss Bretherton, who always manages to maintain a wonderful calm and self-restraint under the most trying circumstances.

At any rate, she told cook they must have fried ham and eggs for dinner—if you ever heard of such a thing on a Sunday at the rectory! and the Archdeacon of Saskatchewan preaching in the morning on behalf of the C.M.S. too!

Moreover, Miss Bretherton was ten minutes late for church, a thing never known before in the memory of the oldest inhabitant; and then, still more remarkable, instead of waiting to speak to people after church, she set off at a terrific pace for Mrs. Price's cottage, and walked in to find the kitchen full of a delightful aroma, and a fine leg of mutton just being taken from the roasting-jack by Esmeralda and placed on the table, which was already adorned with a saucer containing pickled walnuts.

Miss Bretherton knew better than to say, "That's my leg of mutton." Our village understands all about "having the law on 'un," if anyone upsets their feelings in any way. Therefore, swallowing hard, and determining for the hundredth time not to lose her temper, she said, "Where did you get that leg of mutton from, Mrs. Price?"

Had the woman replied, "From the butcher," that would have been fairly incriminating, because, of course, we don't require more than one sheep a week for home consumption in the village, and, as everybody knows, each sheep has only two legs, and it wouldn't require a Sherlock Holmes to track those two legs any week in the year. As it happened, this week's other leg had gone to my house. Had Mrs. Price claimed it as her own, she would have been undone.

But she was too shrewd for that; she promptly replied, with a look of surprised innocence at such a strange question being asked by Miss Bretherton at such a time—

"That leg of mutton, do you mean, miss?" (as though there was a meat market to choose from!) "Yes; ain't it a fine one; it weighs seven pound, if it weighs an ounce." (Miss B. knew that; she had studied the butcher's ticket only that morning.) "I couldn't get it into the oven, so we had to roast it afore the fire. I expect you find the kitchen a bit 'ot. But as

I was saying" (Miss B. had to press her lips together very hard), "it ain't often as I get a windfall like this, but my brother-in-law come up to see us yesterday from Penglyn, and he brought it me for a birthday present; that's why I had to send 'Sm'ralder round to the rectory in the afternoon to fetch my pudding basin as she'd left behind—the one she brought round that day with some new-laid eggs in, what I give her for a present for cook's mother who were bad."

Miss Bretherton pressed her lips still tighter, and walked out. She knew the brother-in-law wouldn't speak to "that Jane" if he met her in the same lane—such was the love between the two families—much less bring her a leg of mutton; besides, he had none too many joints for his own family. She also knew that cook's mother had not been ill, and if she had, it wouldn't have been Mrs. Price who would have supplied the new-laid eggs.

But she also knew the futility of attempting to circumvent a woman of this type, and she hated to have her stand there and tell still more untruths, the children hovering round.

So she returned silently, and served the ham and eggs, and listened while the Archdeacon explained the difference between Plain Cree and Swampy Cree (which, he was surprised to find, she had hitherto confused in her mind, or at best

regarded as one and the same language) with all the Christian grace and forbearance she could muster.

Only once did this nearly give out, and that was when, after she had apologised to their guest for such frugal fare and had briefly outlined the reason for the same, the Rector looked with his usual absent-minded benignity through his glasses at his plate, and said—

"Well, my dear, I hadn't noticed any difference: I thought this was what we usually have for dinner on Sundays."

Just think of it! And for the Archdeacon to go home and tell his wife! So like a man!

This much as a general survey of Mrs. Price's characteristics. She doesn't make an idyllic picture, I admit, nor seem likely to be in the running for a stained glass window in the Parish Room. But then villages no less than towns are made up of varied assortments of human nature—and don't forget we are none of us perfect.

Nevertheless, making all allowances for human frailty, you don't wonder that I wasn't anxious for Mrs. Price to have the free run of my kitchen, and Abigail, remembering that she had left her purse on the dresser, hurried back.

I finished the letter I was writing, and then

went out to see her. As I approached, I could hear her:

"'Sally,' he says, 'don't let the kids fergit me,' and then 'e was gone. It's this new disease they've got from America—the 'germs,' they calls it—and they do say as 'e makes a beautiful corpse, though I shouldn't never have thought it of 'e, the Prices being none of them pertickerlelly well favoured, even if he was me own pore husband's brother. But thur, thur, I say speak nothing but good of them what's gone."

She rose when I appeared, and, with a good deal of side-tracking on to irrelevant matters, chiefly connected with the excellence of her own children, she explained that her late husband's brother had just died "over to Penglyn," a little town fifteen miles away across the hills, and in a most un-get-at-able corner of the county.

The funeral was to-morrow, and neither she nor the family of the deceased had a scrap of black, "leastways, exceptin' this bonnet, which don't look really respeckful to 'im as is gone, being me own husband's own brother." I admit the item that had been placed upon her head—whether for use or adornment it was hard to decide—resembled a jaded hen's nest more than anything else! The rest of her attire consisted of a green skirt, a crimson blouse, and a very light fawn coat (portions of costumes that had

started life in considerably higher social circles in the village), and a purple crochet scarf.

Dimly it occurred to me that I had not seen Mrs. Price in bright colours before, for although she never wore the conventional widow's weeds, she was usually in something black or dark; the matrons in our village haven't gone in for skittish skirts or glaring colour-combinations as yet! I concluded, however, that her black clothes were too shabby. She was saying—

"And I didn't know where to turn, m'm. Everybody saying they hadn't none when I called, and there didn't seem to be a soul left to go to, and that pore dear sister-in-law of mine—leastways same as, being me poor husband's brother's wife—with not a scrap to put on 'cept his best overcoat what she's cuttin' down for one of the boys.

"And then I bethought me of you, it come to me all of a suddint. I put down the pan of 'taters I was peeling and come straight up. 'Sm'ralder says to me, 'But, mother, you can't wear that ole bonnet up to *that* house!' But I says to her, 'It's certain I can't wear what I haven't got, and the Queen haven't sent me one of her done-with crowns yet.' So I just come as best I could."

I was a little surprised to hear that she had been refused at every door, for, irrespective of personal reputation, the better-off residents are

always very good to any of the villagers who may be in want or in trouble; indeed, we have only one mean woman among us, she who once remarked to a paid lady-companion, newly-arrived from a freezingly cold journey, and badly in need of a cup of tea to eke out her skimpy cold-mutton-bone lunch: "I'm sure you will enjoy a glass of water. We have really *beautiful* water here. Pray help yourself when*ever* you like."

Still, it was possible no one had had any black.

I meditated a moment on my own wardrobe and Mrs. Price's capacious waist-measure! Virginia's things would be still less use, as she is the size of a sylph.

"I'm afraid I haven't anything that would fit you in the way of a skirt," I began, "but I've a large winter jacket if you don't think it will be too warm for June."

"Oh, thank you, m'm. It's only the first week in June. I'm a *very* chilly person" (no one looking at her buxom proportions would have thought so!), "and a thick jacket is just what I'm needin' terrible bad. And if you had a skirt, it 'ud be jest the size for my pore dear sister-in-law. Ah, I can feel for her, being a widow myself, and left with them children. She said to me on'y yesterday, 'Jane, do try to get me a

black skirt from anywhere, if on'y you can. She says——"

"But you told me just now that you hadn't seen her since before her husband died," blurted in Abigail, forgetful of her usual good manners, and begrudging to see the family wardrobe being disbursed in this way, as she rather regarded my coats and skirts as her perquisites.

Mrs. Price turned full upon Abigail that look of surprised innocence that stood her in such good stead. "She said it in a letter she writ me yesterday," she replied with dignified composure.

Finally I told her I would look her out something if she sent Esmeralda up for it in the evening. Mrs. Price lingered to recite further tales of woe to Abigail, till she, kind girl, in spite of her private estimate of the lady, bestowed on her a pair of black lisle thread gloves, as she spoke so pathetically about having to go to the funeral with bare hands and not being able to afford any gloves.

When Virginia came in from "sticking" sweet peas in the garden, I told her about Mrs. Price.

"Well, I don't consider her a worthy object for charity as a rule," she remarked. "But at the same time, if Fate kindly supplies me with an opportunity to get rid of that big black hat of mine that I've never liked and never intend to

wear again, I'm not the one to disregard it, especially as it will save my carrying that huge hat-box back to town. But whether she or the 'sister-in-law-same-as' wears it, either will find it good weight for the money."

So we left the winter jacket, and the hat, and a black blouse Ursula added to the parcel, and my black cloth skirt for the sister-in-law, against Esmeralda should come for them. And then we started out to make some calls.

Passing Miss Primkins' house, we just stopped to leave a book I had promised to lend her. Miss Primkins is a pleasant middle-aged lady, of very small independent means, who lives in a cottage by herself. The door stood open as usual. She looked over the stairs when I knocked, then explained that she would be down in a moment if we would go in.

"I've been turning out things in the box-room —in order to find a little black for that Mrs. Price. Her husband's brother has just died, and the funeral is to be to-morrow, and she says no one in the place has any black in hand. So she came and asked me if I would mind *lending* her a black mantle!—*lending* it to her indeed!

"I asked her what she had done with that black dolman I gave her not three months ago—you remember that dolman trimmed with black lace that I was rather fond of? I bought it—oh, it

must be at least ten years ago—for my uncle's funeral. It was trimmed with two bands of crêpe, one about four inches deep, and the other three inches, or perhaps two-and-three-quarters; very stylish it looked, too. Then I had the crêpe taken off and some black silk put on it—very good ottoman silk it was—that had originally been part of a black silk dress belonging to my sister. Next I had it covered with fancy net with velvet appliqué for a change—not that I liked it, or would have thought of having it done had I known what it was going to cost. But they do take you in so at those town shops; why, I could have got a new dolman for what it cost to cover that one! And then it lasted no time, used to catch in everything, so I had next to no wear out of that.

"I had it taken off, and the dolman *thoroughly* turned—every bit; and the dressmaker put on some fringe, a sort of wavy fringe; but I had to have it taken off, because that Gladys Price, when she came home for a holiday, had on a silk coat trimmed with fringe exactly like it, so there again I got taken in, as you might say.

"After that, I put my brown fur trimming on it, but for the winter only; and then for the summer I put on some deep black lace. I hadn't had that lace on more than six months when I gave her the dolman. (I remember quite well sitting up late that night to pick the lace

all off it.) Altogether, you can't say I had so much wear out of any of it, and it was a constant expense. And yet, would you *credit* it, when I asked her what she had done with it, she said it had 'wored out'! Why, *I* could have had it another ten years in good use, without its being 'wored out.' She's a thriftless woman, that's what she is. Still, I suppose it isn't for us to judge her."

We had to hurry on. I wanted to call on Miss Bretherton, who had sprained her ankle and needed commiseration. We found her in that state of suppressed and bottled-up-in-a-Christian-manner irritation that is common to very active women who are suddenly tied to a chair with some of their machinery out of gear; and, like most other women under similar conditions, she was trying to do ten times as much as she ought to have done, in order to prove to everybody that there was nothing the matter with her.

"You'll just have to come into the midst of all this muddle," she sighed, "for I can't move myself into another room."

"Sorting things for a jumble sale?" I inquired, looking at sundry piles of garments strewn about her.

"It almost amounts to that; though I really started out to get a few things together for a

woman in the village who seems to be rather needy at the moment, that Jane Price. Her brother-in-law has just died—you remember Zebadiah Price, who lived at Briar Bush Cottage before they took a little place at Penglyn? We lost sight of them after they left here—it's such a cross-country place they've gone to. I'm rather surprised they haven't asked the Rector to bury him, he thought a good deal of Zebadiah; but all the same I'm glad they haven't, for it takes you the best part of a day to cover that fifteen miles, and he has a slight cold. It seems she's going to the funeral to-morrow.

"I admit there are several women in the parish I should feel a greater pleasure in helping—she does try my patience at times—but I felt I ought to do what I can in this particular case, as she doesn't seem able to get any black from anyone else. Everybody says they gave theirs to the last jumble sale, she tells me, though *I* didn't see any of it!

"She is wanting some for Zebadiah's family too; they are left in bad straits, she says. I was only too glad to find that she and her sister-in-law have buried the hatchet at last; they've been at loggerheads for years; she really spoke very nicely about it. She said the older she got the more she felt life was too short to spend it in quarrelling, and at a time like this she thought bygones should be bygones. I don't like to mis-

judge the woman," Miss Bretherton continued with a sigh. "Sometimes she seems so anxious to do right. Her bringing up was against her. And yet——" And then the Rectoress closed her lips firmly determined to say no uncharitable thing, even about "that Jane Price."

I'm afraid I didn't think too highly of Mrs. Price at that moment. I remembered the parcels of black garments waiting at my house and again at Miss Primkins'. Moreover, Mrs. Price's occasional lapses into fervent piety annoyed me very much, because I suspected they were developed for my benefit. She always gave me a long recital of woes and financial difficulties whenever she saw me, and invariably finished up with, "But thur, thur, I don't let it worry me, for I always say, 'The Lord will provide.'" I much objected to her taking the Name in vain in this manner, more especially as it generally happened that she gave Providence every assistance in the matter by helping herself to anything that lay within reach of her hand!

We did not stay long at the rectory, as I wanted to call on the lady of the manor. She kept us waiting a few minutes before she appeared; but explained, as she apologised for the delay, "I've just turned out five trunks, two cupboards, and four chests of drawers—and goodness knows how many more I should have

set upon it you hadn't come! It's a pastime that seems to grow upon one like taking to drink or gambling—the more you have the more you want!

"I only meant to look through one chest for a black bonnet I thought I had put there—I'm trying to find some funeral wear for that Mrs. Price. Her husband's brother has died, Zebadiah Price; they live over the hills at Penglyn. While he was alive, she hadn't a good word to say for his wife; but now he's gone, her conscience seems to worry her, and she says she feels the very least she can do is 'to show respeck to the remains,' and she wants to help his family. So I've been going over a good deal of ancient history in my search for garments calculated to show a sufficiency of respect. She said she was afraid that what she had on might give a wrong impression."

"If she wore the same set of glad rags that she had on when she came to see us, likewise asking for mourning," Virginia interpolated, "she'd give the impression of a ragged rainbow gone wrong and turned inside out, rather than a funeral."

"Oh, she's been to you, has she? She told me she couldn't think of making so bold as to intrude her troubles on other people, and only came to me because she knew I had been so kind to Zebadiah years ago when he was ill;

and added that my clothes always suited her so well!"

When we got outside, Virginia suggested with a twinkle that we should call on a few more people. We did, and at every house we were met with the sad intelligence of Zebadiah Price's death and his sister-in-law's quest for suitably respectful apparel.

Surely Royalty could not have been more universally mourned—in our village, at any rate!

Next Sunday we were rather puzzled on entering the church to see an ample lady clad in the most resplendent of widow's weeds, sitting in solitary state in the very front row—a seat usually patronised only by the halt and maimed.

Her dress and mantle were of dull black silk trimmed with crepe about a quarter of a yard in depth. True, it was not quite new, but its cut and style were unmistakable; anyone who possessed such a dress could afford to wear it even after its first newness had worn off; it stamped the wearer as a lady of means. A long weeper, black kid gloves, and a black-bordered handkerchief completed all we could see of the lady. We could only conclude that the distinguished stranger must be very deaf indeed, to take the front seat.

By this time all the congregation as it came in was interested. Such a stylish stranger would

naturally attract attention. She kept her head devoutly bent, and used the handkerchief frequently; we couldn't see her face. She might have been a peeress-in-waiting, judging by the dignity and decorum of her bearing.

It was just as the Rector was repeating the opening sentences that the resplendent one turned round to see the effect she was making on the congregation, and behold—that Mrs. Price!

I am afraid I only just saved myself from making the time-honoured remark, "*Did* you EVER!"

"But what I want to know is this,' said Miss Primkins (as several of us walked together along the high road after church, leaving Mrs. Price giving details of the funeral, and the innumerable wreaths, to her friends). "Where did she get those weeds from? There isn't a widow among us, nor a relative of a widow, so far as I know. Now who gave them to her?"

But we none of us knew. It certainly looked suspiciously as though Mrs. Price had used the poor late Zebadiah as an excuse for dragging the whole county!

I wasn't surprised that she herself had donned fresh weeds, for as we are remarkably healthy upon these hills, we are apt to make the most of a funeral when it chances our way, and the opportunity to wear mourning, carrying with it,

as it does, a certain personal distinction, is not to be passed over lightly.

On one occasion I remember meeting a farmer's wife on Sunday morning in deep black (that had done duty for several previous family bereavements), weeping into her handkerchief as she went along the road to church. We stopped to inquire about her trouble.

"My poor old mother's gone at last," she sobbed. We were truly sorry for her grief, and asked when she had died.

"Well, I 'spect it would be about three or four this morning; that's the time they usually go. I had a letter last night saying as how they didn't reckon she'd live the night. So she'll be gone by now. My poor mother! I'll never see her again!" and she wept afresh.

I'm glad to say the mother is still alive, and very flourishing.

It was about a fortnight later that Virginia gave me the wildly-exciting information, culled from the local paper, that some Roman remains had just been excavated. I murmured "Oh!" in that absent-minded way people will do when their thoughts are called off the subject of What shall we have for the midday meal? to higher things.

I was thinking like this: "I did intend to have steak and kidney pudding, but as the

butcher is late, there won't be time to cook it; there isn't enough cold tongue—at least, that knobbly end part is no use—we have plenty of eggs in the house, so we must just make out with that soup left over from yesterday and omelettes; or we might easily have——"

"Either a viaduct or an amphitheatre or a villa; they aren't sure as yet which it is," went on Virginia. "You read about it yourself; it's awfully interesting. There; in that column—see? 'Roman Remains at Penglyn.'"

"At Penglyn? It can't be Zebadiah," I commented; "he wasn't as old as *that!*"

Nevertheless, we aren't particular to a few hundred years in our village. For I remember last year an old woman telling me, "Have you heard, m'm, of the great news in the village? The Black Prince is staying at the Inn! Yes, to be sure! And he seems to understand our language beautiful, he do; though they say he does speak the foreign to a gentleman what's staying there with him. The only thing I was surprised about was to see how young he do look, considering of his age. Why, I remember hearing tell about him when I was at school!" Later on I found the historic potentate was a harmless Indian law-student.

Virginia kept on about the Roman excavations, and announced her intention of going to see them. I protested that I wasn't going to be

hauled across a stony mountainous region in a wagonette, and then change twice by slow train, an hour or so to wait at each change, and ditto to get back, all to see a few brick walls, when the garden so badly needed weeding.

She was indignant, said she should prefer to go alone to having unsympathetic and uninformed society ; reminded me of the histories of nations that had been found embedded in brick walls, waxed eloquent on the subject of the Egyptian hieroglyphics and the Rosetta Stone, skipped lightly from the pointed apex of the Pyramids to the significance of the flat roofs of Thibet, examined the walls of the buried cities in central Asia, and before I had fully realised that I was really travelling in the East, I found that she was examining the designs on the Aztec pottery of ancient Mexico.

Fearing that we should have this sort of thing straight on end for a week, I said we would go next day, weather permitting, if only she would help me decide whether to have the omelette plain, or a cheese omelette, or would they prefer macaroni cheese ? I have found in the past that the crystallisation of thought necessary to follow Virginia, when she is in an informing mood, creates a vacuum, and then I get a cold in my head.

I also inquired whether she would prefer to drive all the way, or go by train.

She replied, still with her eyes glued to the interesting newspaper treatise on antiquarian relics, that she would rather I settled these minor details, adding that she always liked to leave the arrangement of everything to me, as it gave her such opportunities to point out to me the feebleness of my methods and ideas.

I decided to go with her, simply because I knew that unless she had some firm, restraining force beside her, she would go and buy that Roman viaduct, amphitheatre, or villa, and order it to be sent home; and, for all I knew, she might give *my* address in a fit of wandering-mindedness, and what should *I* do with it when it arrived? You can't pack an amphitheatre away in the empty pigsty, and all the other space was occupied with seedlings and things!

Besides, she has no bump of locality (neither have I, for the matter of that); but I thought it would look better if two of us were arrested for wandering about without any visible means of subsistence; at least, I could say I was her keeper.

Next morning we inquired of the barometer as to the weather prospects. By the way, that barometer is a unique treasure. V. and U. gave it to me one birthday; I had long been craving one that was a genuine antique. There was no doubt about this one—its antiquity, I mean; for the rest, until you get on speaking terms

with it, I admit that it does seem a trifle ambiguous.

But I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, so I'll say no more on this point, save that we tapped it vigorously; whereupon the long hand flew wildly round and round one way, while the short hand did a whirligig, equally excitedly, in the opposite direction.

We waited till they both got tired of spinning round, and then, as the long hand pointed to "Much Rain," with leanings towards "Stormy," we knew we could rely on a very fine day.

But we tapped it once again, just to make sure it knew its own mind. After it had wiggled giddily round as before, the long hand stopped midway between "Set Fair" and "Very Dry." Of course that confirmed our former calculations, and we got out our new summer hats, and left our umbrellas at home. Virginia had worn *her* new hat indoors most of the previous day, in order to get her money's worth out of it, because she said she never got her money's worth out of any of her garments, save her raincoat and her umbrella. [N.B.—Is an umbrella a garment?]

It was market day when we got there, and all the town was of course wending its way either to or from the market-place. One of the very first people we ran against was Mrs.

Zebadiah Price; but, to our surprise, she was wearing neither my black cloth skirt nor Ursula's black blouse. On the contrary, she was in quite gay attire—a brown coat and skirt, a blue blouse, a lace collar, a string of pearls as large as marbles, and a tuscan straw hat trimmed with roses and purple geraniums. I had known her in the past, when she lived in the village; so I stopped and spoke to her.

"I was so very sorry to hear of your sad trouble," I began. Yet the subdued tones I used and felt necessary to the occasion seemed curiously out of place beside all that market-day finery.

"Yes, thank you, m'm; it did upset me awful," she said, looking very woe-begone.

"I'm sure it did," I said feelingly.

"You wouldn't believe how I fretted over 'un. Seems kind o' foolish I s'pose when I've got the children. But I got that attached to 'un."

"I can *quite* understand it," I murmured sympathetically. "After all, children can't take the place of the one that is gone."

"No, m'm; that's what I say."

"And it was very sudden, wasn't it?"

"Yes'm; taken bad and gone in a few hours," she continued. "And that was the second I lost in two months. I don't have no luck somehow."

"The second in two months!" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes'm, and I feel that downhearted about it, I don't think I'll go in for another. I said so only last night to my husband."

"Your husband?" I echoed again. It was beginning to sound like bigamy!

"He said at the time he thought the £15 I give was a swindle for the brindled cow."

"The brindled cow?" I said feebly. I really didn't know what else to say. Virginia need not have laughed!

Then I rallied my senses. "But I thought you had trouble about a fortnight ago—your husband, Zebadiah Price—I heard——"

"My Zeb? About a fortnight ago? Let's see?"—thoughtfully turning her left eye in the direction of the church spire, and thereby tilting her hat askew. "Ah, I expect you mean about last February; to be sure, he did have a touch of this 'ere influenza; and he were a bit queer for a couple of days, he were: but that was nothing to my losing my calf!"

"I'm glad it was no worse," I said heartily. "Why, Mrs. Jane Price told me she was coming to the funeral."

"*Jane!*" ejaculated Mrs. Zebadiah. "Jane Price said she was coming to *his* funeral? Not if I know'd it, and it had been me very own even, she wouldn't; the *hussy*—begging your

pardon, m'm, for using sech a word. She knows better than to try to put so much as a shoenail of her foot inside our door. She never aren't and she never shan't. Though for brazenness there ain't their beat in the county. Why, p'raps you've heard how that there Gladys Price has started an ole clothes shop in the town here, right under our very nose, and my husband as respected as he is. There it is for everybody to read over the door—'G. PRICE. Ladies' and Gents' Hemporium'—whatever that may be! Coming to his funeral, indeed. It makes me *broil!*" And Mrs. Z. went off fairly sizzling with indignation.

When we had duly found (after long search) and surveyed the Roman remains (which consisted of three upright stones, something like those used for kerbstones in the streets, and stood in the middle of a very boggy field), and had failed to decide whether they were the viaduct, the amphitheatre, or the villa, I suggested a speedy return to the station, as it was now coming down a steady drizzle, with indications of still more to follow. But Virginia said—

"I'd like, while we're here, just to have a look into the hemporium window, to see what she has marked that hat of mine."

When we reached it, behold, it was like taking a regretful look back into the past, for

most of the garments there displayed we had formerly known when they walked our village street in decorous Sunday glory. And they included: a grey cloth coat of mine that had disappeared most mysteriously; a long silk scarf of Ursula's that, so far, she had never missed; and a bead-bag I had often admired when carried by the lady of the manor, and which, we felt sure, she had never given away.

"Talk about excavating Roman remains!" I exclaimed; but Virginia's conversational powers were only equal to "*Did* you EVER!"

And we damply faded away in the direction of the station.

VII

Just Being Neighbourly

Those superior Londoners who know nothing at first hand about Nature "unimproved," the type who find complete satisfaction for soul, body and mind at some loud and crowded sea-side resort, sometimes say to me: "I can't think how you can endure the terrible isolation of the country—with absolutely nothing to look at, no one to say a word, nobody to take the slightest interest in you, dead or alive. Well, *I* should go out of my mind in such solitariness! But then, I am *so* human; I do like a little life," etc.

I don't attempt to convert such people. After all, they are just as much entitled to their views as I am to mine. Besides, I am only too thankful that they keep away from our hills, and disport themselves in an environment more in keeping with their personal tastes. We don't want the blatant woman, or the overdressed (which nowadays means underdressed) woman, or the artificial woman, or the woman who "likes a little life"; our hills would never suit them as a background, either mentally or otherwise. Why, we have neither a music-hall nor a picture palace for I don't know *how* many miles round! A benighted spot, isn't it!

But when they reproach us with having no one to say a word, and nobody to take the

slightest interest in our doings—well, I *could* say many things! But I merely assure them that we are nothing if not neighbourly!

I took my sewing and went down to the bottom of the lower orchard. It was a warm day, but not too hot to sit out of doors at eleven in the morning, provided one found a shelter from the sun overhead. As I have explained before, my cottage is on a steep hillside, the whole earth runs either up or down. In only a few favoured spots can you place a chair—and sit on it—with any degree of certainty; and even then you probably have to level up the back, or the front, by putting some flat stones under two of the legs. The slope of the hill faces south; hence we get all the sun there is.

The bottom of the lower orchard was just the place for such a day. A wall with overhanging tangles of honeysuckle and ivy, and an oak-tree that spread big arms well over the wall, gave just the shade one needed from the blazing sun. I put the wicker chair with its back to the wall —and such a comfort a wall is anywhere out of doors when you want to sit down.

The view from this spot is very restful on a summer's day: the hot south is behind; one faces the cooler, glareless northern sky above the hill that rises before one.

This orchard is but sparsely populated with fruit-trees, and most of these are very old. There are some huge pear-trees that rise tall and fairly straight, suggestive of rather well-fed poplars. There are some twisted, rugged apple-trees, every branch and twig presenting a wonderful study in silver and grey and green filigree, where the lichens have spread and revelled unmolested for many a year. The lichens are so marvellously beautiful, it always takes me quite a time to get down to the lower wall; there is so much to look at on the way. The delicate fronds, that seem closely related in their appearance to the hoarfrost designs on the winter windows, show such a variety of different cluster-schemes. They decorate the odd corners, and throw beauty over the hard knots and gnarls, till I sometimes think they are among the most exquisite things Nature has ever produced—only while I am thinking this, I come upon something else equally beautiful.

Even on a hot day, when most of the mosses and lichens have faded in the glare and drought, we still find the silvery-grey tracery flourishing on the shady side of the apple-trees, and on the pieces of branches that were snapped off and blown down into the long grass by the equinoctial gales. I usually gather up an armful of these branches, with their delicate pencil studies on a darker background, and carry them down to the bottom

of the orchard with me—only to wonder why I didn't leave them where they were till I returned, as I have to carry them back up the hill again presently!

It may seem weakly sentimental to those who do not understand, but I confess that, much as I love the smell of burning apple-wood, it always gives me a real pain to put on the fire twigs that are ornamented with moss or lichen. It seems heartless to destroy such beauty, even though there is "plenty more where that came from," as people sometimes tell me.

In the summer I put the pieces of the grey-green branches, that I gather up about the orchard, in the empty hearths and grates.

Many of the old trees originally planted in the lower orchard have died or been blown down; the wind takes a heavy toll from these heights; we can't have pergolas and rose arches up here, as they can lower down in the valley, unless we fasten them to very firm foundations.

As no previous owner in this happy-go-lucky district thought it worth whiles to put new stock in the place of the fruit-trees that have come down, there are plenty of open spaces, and comparatively little to obstruct the view as you sit against the bottom wall and look up the hillside. I am afraid this orchard is more ornamental than useful, for the pears are the hard bitter sort used

for making perry, a drink that is very popular locally; and the apples are the equally uninteresting-to-the-taste cider variety. Yet they are so exceptionally beautiful, as the fruit turns crimson and yellow and golden brown, that the trees become a glory of colour in fruit-gathering time.

After all there is excuse for ornament without specific use, if a thing be very, *very* ornamental —and the orchard certainly is that.

The sun reaches well under the trees, where the wild flowers and grasses make a softly waving sea of colour. Of course, I know the grass ought to be kept cut, so as to prevent undue nourishment being taken from the earth for the support of "mere weeds." But we pretend that it is properly cropped by "Hussy;" she is the mild-eyed dusky Jersey, belonging to the farmeress who supplies our milk, and is so-called, because she has a playful habit of kicking over the pail.

Occasionally she is turned in and roams about at meditative leisure, to the indignation of the small dog, who regards her as a hated rival. But once the fruit appears, she has to be removed; either she chokes herself with pears, or else they don't agree with the butter; or various other things. Even a cow seems a complicated problem when you own a real one; and though I have only had cow-anxieties secondhand, so to speak, my acquaintance with "Hussy" has led me to

wonder whether, on the whole, a tin of milk is a more sure and certain investment for sixpence-halfpenny.

But even when the orchard has a tenant, it is surprising how little damage she seems to do to the wild flowers. This is all the more remarkable if you have ever seen what devastation one simple-minded cow is capable of, if it indulges in but a ten minutes' revel in your flower-garden! "Hussy" seems to eat carefully round the flowers, leaving the whole plant intact, which is more than a mowing machine will do, despite its much vaunted up-to-dateness. Civilisation has still a lot to learn.

Every season has its special flower show in this orchard. I only wish I could get the same never-failing succession of flowers in my garden that Nature does in hers.

On this particular July day the large field scabious was perhaps the most noticeable flower; its mauve-blue blossoms high above all the rest; its long stalks always determining to out-top everything else that grows in the delightful medley.

"Please, ma'am, I've brought you some flowers," said a little pinafored girl to me one day, when I had just arrived. She is an especial favourite of mine, and lives in a cottage along my lane. This is her way of just being neigh-

bourly. In her hand was a large bunch of scabious and grasses.

"These are very pretty," I said. "What do you call them?"

"Please, ma'am, I call them 'Queen Mary's Pincushions,'" she said shyly.

The country names for the flowers are often so much more interesting than the ones you find attached to them in books. After all, "Queen Mary's Pincushion" has something real and understandable about it for just ordinary people like myself; whereas *Scabiosa arvensis* (its proper name) doesn't stir my heart the least little bit. It was easy to see the process by which the child had got the name—the flowers are wonderfully like plump round pincushions, with the stamens for the pins: but anything so delicately beautiful would not be suitable for aught save a royal lady's dressing-table; hence Queen Mary was, of course, the one to whom they were dedicated.

And isn't the name "Lady's Laces" most suggestive? That is what we call the white filmy flowers of the hedge-parsley. I seldom see a fine white lace evening gown without thinking of the soft mist of white over green that surprises us in June, and smothers the orchard when the Lady's Laces suddenly burst into billows of bloom.

Some of the local names are more material and prosaic than idealistic, however. There is

another flower that grows all about the orchard, in close company with the scabious; it has bunches of bright yellow flowers of the daisy family, growing in compact heads at the top of a tall stem. I am very fond of this flower; it gleams sunshine all over the place; but I don't care to call it *Senecio Jacobæa*, which is its proper name; it's so mortifying when people look at you puzzled and inquiring, and then ask, with a patient sigh, if you would mind *spelling* it! I never could spell.

Neither do I care for its other slightly less official name, "Common Ragwort." So one day when an old man was passing, who is fairly well-up in flowers, I asked him if he could tell me the name of this Sunshine plant. To which he replied—

"Wealluscallsemards'm."

I didn't ask him to spell it, because I don't fancy he can spell any better than I can. I merely said, "I don't think I *quite* caught the name?"

"I said 'ARDS,' Mum; (*crescendo*) 'ARDS.' We allus calls 'em that 'cos they're so 'ard to pull up."

I thanked him, and still, in secret, call them the Sunshine flowers—though I admit that Virginia, having recently set out gaily to rectify my shocking laxity in the matter of the proper cultivation of an orchard, at last decided herself to call them "'Ards." She found that the act

of sitting down violently and unexpectedly so many times in the course of trying to pull up a few innocent-looking plants, wore her out more than it did the 'ards; so she gave it up at length, and there they remain until this day!

Intermingling with Queen Mary's Pincushions and the Sunshine flowers is a rosy purple flower that blends delightfully with the other two; Knapweed is one of its names; it looks something like a thistle bloom at a distance, but it is really a relation of the Sweet Sultan that grows in the garden beds, I believe.

Then there are Harebells dancing in the wind on the top of little grassy mounds; so frail they look—yet "Hussy" never seems to walk on them! Ragged Robins flutter pink petals beside a little brook that runs down at the side of the orchard; and here are also big blue forget-me-nots, with bright yellow centres.

But there is one thing about this orchard that very few people have discovered, and that is the host of sweet-smelling things that you walk on or rub against, as you carry the wicker-chair down to the bottom wall.

Do you know what it is like to walk on Pennyroyal and Sweet Basil? Have you ever stood still suddenly and said, "What *is* it?" as a delicious aromatic scent added itself to all the other lovely scents floating around?

I discovered a whole world of beautiful scents

in among the orchard grass. The Pennyroyal was most unsuspicious-looking, till I stepped on it. (I didn't mean to step on it; but then one must walk *somewhere!*) Next I found out the Sweet Basil, with its unobtrusive pink flowers.

Still I hadn't found it all; a little later I came upon some wild mint beside the brook. The tansy I had long been friendly with; the scent of it seems to fit in so exactly with a hot summer day; and the wild thyme that grows on a sunny bank at one side of the orchard you couldn't possibly miss, the bees have so much to say about it. Bushes of balm, that have possibly strayed away from the garden, are always at hand, to rub a leaf when desired.

But I think of all my favourites, the black peppermint has first place. I shall never forget the day I first discovered its dark shoots pushing up undaunted among the grass; not but what I had a long-standing friendship with peppermint—in my first childhood, as bull's-eyes; in my second childhood, as peppermint creams.

But I hadn't the slightest notion what it was like in its natural state. When once I found it, I soon realised that it stood alone among all the scented wonders. I put some of it at various corners about the garden, because I found it has remarkable healing powers. No matter how dispirited you may be or out of joint with the world, it is only necessary to take a leaf, rub it

and sniff it, whereupon the world smiles again, and you realise that, in spite of all, it is good to be alive. You will understand, therefore, how essential it is to have it in handy places, so that weary people, even if they do not know of its unique qualities, may rub against it in passing, and unconsciously come under its spell.

It dies down in the winter, but when spring comes we always look eagerly for the first purple-black shoots pushing up cheerily from the soil.

It has only one fault; it suffers from zeal without discretion. It will not keep within proper bounds. At the present moment I am wondering whether it is better to dig up the bergamot or rout out the peppermint; they are having a hand-to-hand fight for supremacy in one particular flower corner.

I am afraid my needlework was a mere matter of form that morning. Who could glue their eyes to a piece of hemstitching with the whole earth fairly dancing with colour and light around them? I faintly (but not very earnestly) wished that I had brought knitting instead of sewing, because that doesn't need to be looked at, and you can keep up a semblance of respectable industry while you are watching all the wild things.

I had been feeling rather aggravated with a woman who had written commiserating with my

odd predilection for being "buried" in a spot where there was "positively nothing to be seen." She was really pitying me! Well, I pitied her back, and pitied her hard; had she only known it, she would have been aggravated too. So at least we were quits. She had said that, for her part, she should simply die in such an unsociable place. I took care to be just as sorry for her as she was for me: it was a slight satisfaction to me! It was at this moment that I heard voices of two women talking in the lane, hidden from view by the orchard wall.

"How's yourself, Mrs. Blake?"

"Only middling." (We always start our conversations with lugubriousness; it seems indecorous to parade health and happiness before our neighbours!) "I'm in a tearing hurry. I've just been to the doctor's to see if he can't give me something for my poor Jim's tooth. It do pester him something cruel. I promised him I'd run all the way there and back; he'll be raving till I get back."

"Ah, he won't get no peace till he has it out, I reckon."

"The doctor says why don't he have 'em out and get some new 'uns? But I call it waste. Look at my sister's husband: cost him a guinea his did! Of course, he got a complete set top and bottom for that, fifty-three teeth altogether I believe he told me, and as natural

as you please, I'll own. But seeing as of course he's got to take 'em out to eat, I call it spending just for show, even if they do give you a good mouthful for your money."

"By the way, speaking of teeth reminds me —only I can't stop to tell you all about it now, as the children'll be in from school at half-past twelve, and I haven't started the dinner yet— but I've just heard that poor Mrs. Jeggins over to Brownbrook's gone."

"Pore thing! Is she though?'

"Yes, your mentioning Jim's tooth made me think of it. They fancy it started with a tooth in her case too; for she had faceache turrible bad about six months ago, her husband told me. And then it just went all over her like. The doctor simply couldn't do nothing with it. He tried every mortal bottle he had in his surgery, and gave her some out of every single one, and *yet* she died! But there, I s'pose it had to be!"

"I heeard tell from her sist'r-'n-law as she drank somethin' awful; but, mind you, if it's a lie, 'taint my lie; it's her lie as told me. And I don't at all hold with repeating a thing like that. But in any case, I shouldn't think it was her tooth! I expect she et something that didn't agree with her."

"Well, maybe; as I always say, you can't be too careful what you eat nowadays. The dinner they've got up there smells tasty, don't it?"

"Yes; it's roast duck."

"Duck, is it? I didn't know they'd had a duck *this* week. Who did they get it from?"

"Sarah Ann Perkins—that old brown one of hers."

"The *brown* one! How much did she ask for it?"

"Four-and-six." (An audible chuckle.) "Yes, *four-and-six*, if you believe me! Fancy her having the face to ask it for that *brown* duck! But there, those that can afford to pay may just as well do so for those who can't."

"Just as well. But—*four-and-six!* And she won't finish it up neither; doesn't care for cold poultry, I'm told; she'll have a fair slice from the breast, but that's all; never allows it to be seen in the dining-room a second time. And there's only the two of them there now. Still, that Abigail's a hearty eater! My husband was up there a-fixing a tile that had got loosish on the roof, and he told me what she et that day. A gammon rasher and an egg and four slices of bread and butter and a piece of fried bread out of the frying-pan and two cups of coffee—half milk—and some jam for breakfast. He was just a-going up the ladder past the kitchen window at the time; and when he come down, finding as he needed a bit of cement, she was having lunch of bread and cheese and a cup o' tea out of her lady's teapot—she always has a cup of tea

between 'leven and twelve—and he'd smoked his pipe right out afore she'd finished. And when he come down again at dinner-time she was having a dinner fit for a growed man just come home from the cattle market—made him hungry to see her, it did; he hung about a bit looking for his jack-knife, as he wanted something to measure with. And at tea-time he went in for a drop o' water to mix the cement, and she was having potted meat and toast—butter, too, not dripping toast, if you ever did. But, of course, she relishes the good vittles she gets in a country place like ourn. So different to the stuff you get in a town."

"You're right there; but they do have a sight o' things down from London. There was a box with 'Army and Navy Stores' writ on it that was so heavy, it was all old Bob could do to get it on his shoulder, with our Tom to give him a hand. Old Bob said he'd been reading in the papers what awful waste there is in some o' the army camps and how the food gets throw'd away or sold by the cartload, to get rid of it, but he didn't know it was going on in the navy too—wicked, I call it. They thought it must be tinned things, it were such a weight, but they couldn't make out for sure, though they rattled it ever so hard to see; it was packed up awful tight."

"Taters weigh heavy, but it wouldn't be

they; she's got plenty, what with new ones coming on soon, and a large box left still of the old ones; I saw them in the scullery last time I was there. I'm going to ask if I can have 'em, I'm so short for the pig. It might have been soap and soda and hearthstone, though; they all weighs heavy."

"That's true. Still, I know for certain she has a heap of queer things sent down, because when I was in Jane Price's the other day, she had a pot of something called 'tunny fish,' whatever that may be, on the dresser. I asked her what it was. She told me she was passing here one day and thought she heard someone calling her name; so she stepped inside and looked around. No one was there, but she chanced to pass the back door, and there on the top of the dustbin she saw this pot. She brought it away with her just to ask our Tom if he knew what it was; but he says they don't catch it about here; never heeard tell on it. Still, those sort of things aren't like a nice piece of fat bacon to my taste, to say nothing of duck; though I like a bit more picking on mine than they'll be on that *brown* one, I reckon."

"D'you know, I expect they're cooking it now to have it cold for the company's supper to-night, because in any case they don't *need* it to-day. They had two chops and a shoulder of lamb and some gravy beef on Saturday. I met the

boy taking it up, and asked him what he had. They'd have the chops that day, and the lamb roast on Sunday, and cold Monday ; and it's only Tuesday now, and they can't have finished it up —it was a fair-sized one ; and there's the gravy beef soup. You may depend it's for the visitors."

"Oh ! I didn't know she was expecting company ? It won't be Miss Virginia and her sister, because they're abroad. She asked my husband to call for her afternoon letters as he was passing the post-office yesterday, and he brought 'em up, and there was a postcard with a picture on it of some foreign place, and it said, 'This is our hotel ; enjoying ourselves immensely ; expect to be here a fortnight.' And there was something written at the bottom that I couldn't make out, but it might have been a 'V,' or a 'U,' only it was smudged so's you couldn't see *what* it was. So it was sure to be from them."

"No, it wasn't they two ; 'twasn't their trunks."

"More than one trunk, is there ? Then they're going to stay a little while. My Buff Orpingtons have started to lay again ; that's lucky. How many do you say were coming ?"

"I don't know for certain, but I fancy it must be three, because there were two blankets, one single-bed and one double, hanging in the sun when I came past yesterday, and Abigail was polishing the downstairs winders, and she'd got

clean cutt'ns to the little room over the kitchen, as well as in the sittin'-room. Not that there was any need to put up clean cutt'ns, that I can see; those in the sittin'-room had only been up two months, and the upstairs ones were new last time she was down here; you could tell they were new, the muslin hung so stiff. I take it a cutt'n isn't properly washed if it don't last six months at least. But she's very pertickler about cutt'ns. Abigail told my Mabel, that in London they don't never dream of keeping a cutt'n up more than a month, and often th'whole lot is changed in a fortnight; and just think, the winders is done *every week!* Send me crazy, it would! I don't think it's healthy to be as finnicky clean as that; why, you're always opening winders and letting in draughts. And now this morning I see she's got the cutt'ns down in the Flower room——"

"The Flower room? Which be that?"

"Oh, it's the name they've give the one on the right at the top o' the stairs. It's got a new laylock paper on the wall, and she's got a new bedspread, white, with bunches of laylock all about it, and a bit o' eeliertrope sateen hangs down behind the head of the bed to keep the draught off, though it 'ud be far more sense to shut the winder, *I* say, for that sateen's faded dretful in the folds already. I was only noticing it th'other day, when my cousin was up from

Woolv'ampton, and I took her over the house. . . . Oh, yes, Mrs. Widow'll lend me the key any time" (Mrs. Widow is my caretaker), "and it do make a bit of a change to take anyone to My cousin said at the time she'd never buy a bedspread like that; the colour's so fleeting. Besides, she wouldn't have a white ground in any case, it's always in the wash. She's made herself a *lovely* spread, she was telling me, out of a pair of old long curtains, just cutting out the bad places and then dyeing it a deep coffee colour with a little cold tea; makes it last like anything. I say the same; them white spread never pay for themselves. Though I rather like the one she's got with roses on—Hannah Craddock was a-washing of it one day when I dropped in" (Hannah is the village laundress), "that was the last time Miss Ursula was down, because Hannah was doing of her blouses that week, and my Mabel was very taken with one that had bits of crochet let in all about, and points of it up the sleeves just here, and my Mabel tried to copy it, only Hannah had promised it home that very afternoon, so we're waiting for it to come again, as Mabel can't get the yoke quite right. I'm sorry it isn't them who's coming. She wants to get it finished afore she goes to London next month."

"Did you see the name on the trunks? Now you mention it, I saw the boy taking a

telegraft up to the house yesterday—no, the day before."

"It was my husband told me about it, when he looked in home just now, and his sight being so poor, he couldn't see the name" (in spite of the Educational Authorities many of the men in our village cannot read, but by courtesy it is always referred to as poor sight!), "so he asked the station-master if he should drop 'em anywhere, as he had got her ladyship's cart there. He is helping at the Manor House to-day. He'd just taken some hay to the station, and it seemed a real waste o' good time to do nothing with it coming back. But the station-master said they was for up here, and old Bob was taking 'em up as the ladies wouldn't have the fly; said they'd *pefer* to walk. And, would you believe it, he never so much as thought to ask how many there were. Still, I'll soon find out and let you know. I'll go up and ask Abigail if she can oblige me with the loan of a little salt. I've a couple of ducks myself as I'd be glad to get four-and-six apiece for if——"

At this moment Abigail appeared at the cottage door, and the gong reverberated and echoed as she gave it a vigorous hammering, calculated to wake me up wherever I might be.

"Good gracious, that's for her one o'clock dinner!" exclaimed both the women in one breath, and fled in opposite directions, pre-

sumably to minister to the raving and the ravenous!

As the conversation had implied, the duck was tough and inadequate; but it was a certain satisfaction to me—as I sought about in vain for a fairly good slice from the breast of the skinny carcase—to reflect that I hadn't paid for it as yet. I was out when the youthful Perkins had delivered it.

For the rest, I didn't attach any value to the women's gossip. Once you have any real footing in a rural district, and have become part and parcel of the country-side, you soon learn that one impossibility is "terrible isolation." From rosy morn till dewy eve one or another woman is engaged in lengthy gossip with any other she meets, and in nearly every case the topic of exhaustive conversation will be the doings of somebody else; moreover, the less that is actually known about the third and absent party the more two and two will add up to nineteen.

In the main, I have seldom found such gossips either spiteful or slanderous. They consider it being neighbourly to keep count of your sayings and doings.

There were two items in the women's chatter that were enlightening, however. I had always suspected that Mrs. Price knew where certain items from my store cupboard had gone one

winter's night when the cottage was uninhabited and the kitchen window forced. I doubt if there was another person in the place who would have done it. Still I was glad to have the mystery cleared up.

I was not surprised to hear that all and sundry had the run of my house when I wasn't there. The Englishwoman who occupies any house of more than six rooms, we will say (which she can keep clean her unaided self), knows that she never can call any room her own, excepting the one she chances to be in at the moment—and not even that one if the British workman happens to be in the ascendant! It is one of the compensations of life that the smaller our habitation, the more we ourselves get out of it personally—a kind of "intensive" interest. Whereas the larger our domains, the more imposing our houses, the more numerous our rooms, the more they are monopolised by other people—paid assistants for the most part—to the exclusion of ourselves.

In my own very humble way I soon realised that even my country cottage and its contents were only my own so long as I could sit on them, so to speak. I early discovered that my sheets and pillow-cases, my towels and table-cloths, were not allowed to lead a life of idle, selfish exclusiveness in my absences. Mrs. Widow's enterprising married daughter quickly furnished a room at her own cottage over an

outhouse which had hitherto been used as a lumber garret; this she could always let in the summer, when the big houses in the neighbourhood were full up with visitors and extra rooms were needed.

Of course, at times I proved exceedingly tiresome, and turned up at inconvenient moments. But in such an emergency neighbours would assist her with the loan of a sheet here and there and a towel or two, if mine had to be returned hastily. I have always found the poor most ready to help each other—especially when it was a case of "doing" someone who was a little better off.

No, I was not surprised that Mrs. Widow graciously bestowed my door-key on her friends in search of an afternoon's recreation; but I *was* just a trifle curious to know how they had got hold of the lilac bedspread, seeing that it was put away in a cupboard that possessed—so I prided myself—a unique lock; and it had never been used yet—at least, not by me!

After dinner I wrestled womanfully with the overpowering desire to go down the orchard again and do nothing; but a shower seemed threatening, and I decided to answer letters and correct proofs indoors. I told myself I would put in a full afternoon at really solid work, and would even carry it right on into the night, if

need be, without a moment's cessation save for the conventional nourishment—this, in order to clear up some of my arrears, and to enable me to garden the whole of next day with a perky conscience.

"How *do* you kill time on a wet day in the country?" people sometimes ask me. It's simple enough. Here is the recipe:

* Draw up a chair to the table; get out ink and pens from one of the aged oak cupboards beside the fireplace. Open the dresser drawers and haul out stacks of unanswered queries from magazine readers, the office staff, printers, block-makers, artists, authors, and from people of whom I know nothing (friends and relatives gave me up long ago !).

Next, take the heavy lid right off the oak chest (hinges were broken fifty years ago, so it won't lift up properly), dive in for armfuls of MSS., proofs, photographs, diagrams, sketches; place same on table; proceed to hunt among same for some one particular thing I feel I ought to deal with at that particular moment (though it may have lain unhonoured and unsung for weeks); can't find it anywhere. Go through everything again, this time classifying matter slightly by putting it in piles around me on the floor; still can't find it, but unearth much else that ought to have been attended to long ago but wasn't.

Decide to search upstairs; turn out trunks,

turn out cupboards, turn out drawers (incidentally discover and meditate upon various things needing mending); forget what I *was* looking for; go on searching for it; remember presently, and eventually run it to earth in my blotting-book downstairs, where, if I had had any sense, I should have looked in the first instance. Breathe freely, sit down—rather exhausted—to serious work.

A tap at the door; "May I come in?" Enter visitor No. 1. And then they follow in quick succession.

Finally, Abigail kindly undertakes to tidy up my papers "without disturbing a single thing!" *

Next day (if still wet) you repeat from * to *, as they tell us in the crochet patterns.

I had just got settled to work on the missing-and-now-discovered letter, when Abigail tapped and entered.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, ma'am, but could you spare me one of those Missionary books?" pointing to a shelf containing a selection of the annual reports of religious and philanthropic societies.

Now for some time past I had been trying to interest Abigail—who is a church member—in foreign missions. I rather prided myself that I had done it tactfully, not forcing it upon her, but just arousing her interest by taking her to

attractive meetings. I found that she had even gone to one on her own account. Hence I was naturally pleased to find that she was anxious to follow up the subject; but as I did not consider an ordinary official report, with its small print, and balance-sheets and monotonous lists of subscribers, the type of literature best calculated to enthuse the novice, I reached down a small volume of bright stories of girl-life in India, well illustrated and prettily got-up.

"Here is just the very thing," I said. But she took it reluctantly, dubiously, turning it about and looking it over in a dissatisfied manner.

"No," she said, "it's one like that I want," pointing to a solid tome issued by one of the most revered of our missionary societies. "Can I have that one?"

"Certainly," I acquiesced, though it was an out-of-date report, and I knew the other book would have suited her better.

"Yes, that's just right," she said cheerfully, as I handed it to her. "That other'd be too thin; it's to go under the back leg of the side table in the kitchen, where the stone floor's broken. I've used one like this regular since last summer, but it's getting shabby. I thought a new one would smarten us up a bit."

I remember on one occasion being at a missionary meeting for young people, at which

there was a remarkably fine speaker from the foreign mission field. He said that if any felt they had a call to take part in the work in any way, he would be pleased to see them at the close. When the meeting was over, a small boy approached the platform. "Please can I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly, my lad," said the speaker, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Now, what is it? You can talk quite frankly to me."

"Well, I wondered if—er——"

"Have no hesitation, my boy, in asking me anything you like."

"Well, do you happen to have any foreign postage stamps?"

Just as I had settled down again, somewhat chastened, to my much neglected work, there was a knock at the door, and the lady of the manor was shown in.

"I see you're busy," she began; "but I won't keep you a moment. I only want to ask you if you're expecting Miss Virginia and her sister this afternoon? No? Oh, I *am* sorry! I did hope they were coming. But, anyhow, whoever it is, do you think they would help to-morrow at the Sale of Work? Two visitors I was expecting have failed me, and I've no one possible for the picture post-cards or the pinafores. They needn't know anything about it, you know; it only wants

someone who can reckon up that seven penny cards comes to sevenpence, and that's one and ninepence change out of half-a-crown, and that sort of thing. Now, do you think your friends would help?"

"But I've no friends coming," I said.

"*Haven't* you? Why, I quite understood—— I was calling on Miss Primkins just now (she's jam and jelly, you know), and I asked her if she couldn't put it on the pinafores—it would look quite decorative, and in this way I should save a stall; even then we shall be very crowded. Mrs. Blake had just been in to say she couldn't spare Miss Primkins the duck she had ordered, because you had visitors arriving to-day and would want a pair for Sunday."

"Oh!! Well, I'm not having visitors, neither am I having the ducks. But I'll come down myself to-morrow, if that's any help, and keep one eye on the pinafores and one on the picture postcards. And I think my mental arithmetic will be just right for the change you give."

"But, don't you remember, you've already promised to look after the bookstall? You sent us that big box of books months ago, with some of your own books in—which I want you to autograph, by the way. So I was going to ask you if at the same time you'd manage the jumble corner—the two things would go very well together."

I agreed with her heartily.

"Oh, you *know* I don't mean anything like *that!*" she added hastily. "I only meant that you could more easily turn from selling lovely books, to dispose of one of your own done-with-but-still-charming coats and skirts, for instance, than if you had to cut up for the refreshment stall, and return with buttery fingers to respond to the rush there will be for your autograph."

"Add the postcards to the books," I said, trying to be equally amiable, "and Abigail will gladly run the jumble corner; she will be smarter at it than you or I."

Abigail appeared as soon as her ladyship had gone. The farmeress who supplied us with milk was waiting in the kitchen to know if I wanted extra milk morning and evening in future, on account of company; as, if so, she would save it specially. She was experiencing a shortage of milk, "Hussy" having run dry, and "Clover," for some unknown reason that I hadn't time to listen to, not doing her lactic duty as befitted her station in life.

Emphatically I said that I should not want any extra milk—and a few other things.

I resumed my work.

Ten minutes later there was yet another interruption. This time it was the owner of the Buff Orpingtons, who had arrived at the back door to inquire if I was wanting any eggs—she's

brought eight with her, and expected another one to-night, which she'd send up—her hens had just started laying again, etc.

I fairly blessed the individual who had first set going the fable that I was expecting visitors.

I told Abigail that it was a matter of perfect indifference to me whether all the fowls in the district did, or did not, accommodatingly lay nine, or even ten, eggs for my especial benefit; but what did matter to me was whether I could, or could not, get nine or even ten minutes of uninterrupted peace, in order to finish my letters before the postman arrived. (He always calls obligingly at five o'clock for my afternoon mail.) And I requested that she would kindly take in any and everything that came during the next hour (so long as it didn't need paying for!); only, for pity's sake, would she cease opening that door and seeking advice on the subject.

After that I was left severely alone. From time to time I heard voices in the rear; there was one very loud series of bumps and bangs—I concluded it was the missionary report being introduced to the table. But I worked on, and had just sealed up my last budget of proofs, and addressed it to the printers, when the postman appeared. I heaved a sigh at the amount of stuff he carried away. The shower had passed over without even damping the blossoms. I would have some tea, and then start watering.

The postman was speaking to someone at the gate. No, it wasn't Abigail. I heard him say, "Yes; this is Rosemary Cottage." I was gathering up my papers as footsteps dragged themselves along the path—"dragged" is the only word for it—and before I had time to step outside to see who was there, two female forms, one ample and one spare, made for the door opening into the living-room, precipitated themselves into the room, and sank into the nearest chairs, in the last stages of panting exhaustion; while the ample one, in a coat and skirt of a large black and white plaid, buttoned and piped with cerise, exclaimed—

"At last! Well, of all the out-of-the-way forsaken places! We've been tramping nearly all day, trying to get here from that wretched station! We must have walked miles—*miles*—up and down hill, only it was *all* uphill; we found ourselves in woods with no possibility of ever getting out again; we got into lanes that ended nowhere, and when we got there it was the wrong place; we tried to take a short cut across some fields, and got stuck in a bog; we met a flock of wild cows, and the top of that hedge positively ran into me like needles. When we did chance to find a house, hoping it was yours, it never was; the people always told us to go on and ask further directions at the next house we came to, but each time there wasn't

another house. Why ever didn't we take that fly at the station! But there, he could never have driven us over all the huge stone walls we've had to climb! We've been walking for hours on end—*hours*—haven't we, dear?"

"Dear" nodded feebly. She was leaning back in the easy-chair with closed eyes. Her hat—of a remarkable shape—was trimmed with what looked like a kitchen flue-brush standing straight upright at the back; at least, it would have been upright if her hat hadn't shifted askew; at the moment the flue-brush was inclining towards her left ear. Her costume was mustard colour, with spasms of black. She must have been *very* pleased with it when she bought it, otherwise she could never have induced herself to get inside it!

I soon found that the ample one did not require any reply other than the feeble nod, as it would have impeded her eloquence. She went on—

"I think, if you don't mind, we won't go upstairs till we've had some tea. We are absolutely prostrate, aren't we, dear?" The flue-brush dipped slightly. "Could we have some tea at once?"

"Certainly," I said with alacrity. I had already decided that tea was the only possible way to relieve the strain of the situation, and I rang the bell.

Abigail, after one comprehensive glance at the callers, fetched my very best afternoon tea-cloth, which she displayed on the table to the utmost advantage, that not an Irish inlet or a bit of lace border should be lost on the visitors. When she does not approve of any callers, or does not consider them quite in keeping with the family traditions, she invariably makes a terrific splash in front of them, getting out the special silver and the finest china, and serving with an air of withering superiority, as though she said, "Behold! this is how *we* live every day; very different from what *you've* been accustomed to!"

The tiresomeness of it is that when intimate friends call, who really matter, the handmaiden treats the tea-table most casually; they evidently don't count if they are known to be above reproach!

From the look she gave the strangers, I knew we should have it all, and we did! She was wonderfully quick in getting both the tea and her smartest cap and apron. She put as much silver as she could squeeze on the table; she got out some egg-shell china plates for the bread and butter, and the old cut-glass for the preserves. She opened new jars of plum, black-currant, strawberry and raspberry jam; she turned out preserved ginger into a blue Chinese bowl; she put lemon-curd into a quaint brown dish, and

honey in a lustre saucer. She hunted out all the cake we possessed, and opened a tin of apricots; she mashed up sardines with Worcester sauce, and heaped it on pale lettuce leaves, and she garnished some thin slices of ham most artistically with lemon and cucumber and flowering sprigs of rosemary. All this while the ample one was explaining to me how marvellously things were managed in London, the miles you could ride in a motor-bus for twopence, the cleanliness and speed and safety of the Tube, the ever-recurring convenience of a halfpenny in a tramcar, and the luxury of a taxi; and then more moans to think of the miles they had covered without meeting either motor-bus, Tube, tramcar or taxi.

When the table seemed on the very verge of breaking down with its abundance, and they had just drawn up their chairs, Abigail asked in clear tones that the visitors were bound to hear, "Would you wish me to bring in the cold duck, madam?" ("Madam" indicates company; "ma'am" is ordinary every-day.) I wasn't exactly anxious to bestow my to-morrow's dinner on the strangers, for I had reckoned to make the duck do for twice; but, of course, under the circumstances, I was bound to ask sweetly, "Oh, would you care for a little roast duck? It's *cold*," I added, by way of disqualifying the joint a little in their eyes. Fortunately they preferred

ham, but it was satisfactory that at least they knew we had roast duck in the larder.

After sitting up and taking a little nourishment, the wilted ones revived perceptibly, and even began to be gracious. I am afraid I am not very fond of the graciousness of that type of woman; she does get it so mixed up with patronage. But I buoyed myself up with the thought that perchance I was entertaining angels unawares—though they didn't look like it!

The ample one continued to be voluble. I did not interrupt her with questions, because I find it is usually as well to let a situation explain itself; it usually does in time. Besides, I didn't quite know what to say. I couldn't exactly ask, "Who are you? where have you come from? and why have you singled me out for this particular visitation?" Yet the longer I waited, the more awkward it became to open inquiries.

"You have a very well-trained maid, I see," the large plaid continued, "that is to say, for the country"—with emphasis, to show me that there were obvious deficiencies, only she was willing to make allowances for them. "It's the first thing I always notice in a house. We are used to such excellent service—*most excellent* service, aren't we, dear?"

Dear agreed, but not very heartily; she seemed to ponder for a moment before she said her customary "Yes."

"That is one reason why I always hesitate about leaving home." (How I wished she'd hesitated a little longer! The sun was getting behind the fir-trees, and I did so want to start watering!) "You have some garden, I see, but it wants planning, doesn't it? I wish you could see ours at home; it would give you some ideas. We have a man in occasionally; but we always superintend him ourselves. I'll tell you how we have it arranged. In the centre is a square lawn, and in the middle of this we have a round bed with scarlet geraniums in the centre, and a ring of calceolarias round them, and then outside that, at the edge of the bed, you understand, all round, you know, we have lobelias, little blue flowers, you know. You've no idea how bright and effective it is. And then in the border all round the garden by the fences, we have standard roses about a couple of yards apart, and a row of scarlet geraniums. It's so bright, and doesn't cost so much when you buy them by the dozen.

"Your ceiling is very low, isn't it?—still, for a cottage, it isn't a bad-sized room; and I see you've made the best of it with your little bits of things put about." I do wish you could have heard the charming, indulgent condescension with which she said "your little bits of things"! "Though I don't think I've ever seen yellow walls before—very *quaint*, of course, but

—er—rather peculiar. Don't you think so, dear?"

Dear said she did. But I don't know why, seeing that she was carrying about more yellow on her mustard person than I had in the whole of the house!

"I *wish* you could see our *lovely* dining-room at home," the plaid continued. I murmured inarticulations, as there was a pause where I was evidently intended to say something. "It has a dark red paper on the wall. We have just furnished it with fumed oak. I think fumed oak is *so* artistic. We have a most *handsome* sideboard that will only just stand across one end of the room. I don't mind telling you that it cost fifty pounds originally, but as the people to whom it belonged were a little unfortunate, we got it—well, we didn't give quite that much for it; but you'd never know. It was just as good as new. And we have aspidistras and a *beautiful* palm in copper flower-pots—really exquisite works of art they are; and they go so well with the fumed oak, don't they, dear?"

By the time I had been taken over their *beautiful* drawing-room, we had finished tea—happily, for I already saw a *beautiful* best bedroom suite looming ahead.

Having made a most excellent, not to say solid, meal, the voluble one shoved her chair back and said—

"I feel all the better for that cup of tea. Now, I think, if you'll show us the way, we'll go upstairs and have a good wash, and make ourselves presentable—not that you dress much for dinner, I suppose?"

I conclude I, too, was all the better for my cup of tea, for I felt myself warming to the work—and I led the way washstandwards most cordially. I didn't take them out into the hall to the more modern staircase, I opened the door in the corner of the room, and revealed the steep stone stairs; and you should have heard their gurgles and squeals.

"Oh, dearest, *do* look. *Isn't* it primitive? And do you go up and down this every day?"

"Oh, no," I couldn't help replying. "We only use this when visitors are here. On ordinary occasions we get in and out of the bedroom windows, and hop down the honeysuckle."

She drew herself up reprimandingly; she evidently wished me to understand that, though she was willing to treat me as an equal so long as I behaved myself, she couldn't allow any undue familiarity on my part.

"I don't suppose *you* would see anything unusual in such an approach to the upper storeys, having been used to it all your life," she said distantly; "but accustomed as *we* are to our magnificent staircase at home—wide enough to drive up a carriage and pair, isn't it, dear?"—

"Er—nearly——" (Dear was the more truthful of the two, I fancy.)

"—And our beautiful pile carpet, in rich reds and blues, and the thickest of stair-pads underneath, till you would think you were walking on real Turkey carpet, this naturally strikes us as—how shall I put it so as not to hurt your feelings?—as—as very humorous, you know!"

"I quite understand," I said, as we entered my bedroom.

She walked straight over to the window and looked out.

"Not a house to be seen anywhere," she exclaimed dismally, "whichever way you look; nothing in sight but those everlasting tree-covered hills."

As she seemed inclined for a lengthy soliloquy, I poured out some water and indicated the soap-dish, as politely as I knew how, to Dear, who had taken off her hat and coat, and seemed almost grateful for my attentions. I noticed that Abigail had been up and had adorned the towel-horse with my finest damask towels with embroidered ends, and had got out a rare and treasured bedspread made entirely of lace, that had just been sent me as a present from Venice, and had put it over the bed in place of the old-world patchwork quilt that I infinitely prefer in the cottage; it was so much more in keeping with the surroundings.

The ample one turned with a sigh from the depressing outlook that was so deficient in motor-buses and halfpenny car rides and taxis and houses, and said, evidently striving to make the best of a bad job, "At any rate you've tried to make it look as nice as you can inside. Do you know, I rather like that bedspread"—as though conveying a real favour on the article in question. "It reminds me of an *exquisite* bedspread we have at home something like it, only ours is linen, with shamrocks on it in solid embroidery." And she flung down her coat and other *impedimenta* on the top of the lace in a way that made me tremble for its safety. "It's *something* like ours—don't you think so, dear?"

Dear had her face in the soft delicious lather of the rainwater, and didn't reply.

"But"—at this point transformation came over the black and white plaid—"I've only just noticed it! This is a *double* bed! Look, dear, it's a DOUBLE bed! And I most distinctly said in my letter it was imperative that we have two single beds; the same room would do, I said—no need to go to the expense of two rooms—but on no account a double bed. As I can't possibly rest unless I have the bed to myself—I'm a *very* light sleeper, whereas my friend sleeps rather heavily, not to say—er—sonorously, don't you, dear?—I must simply insist that you have this bed taken down and two single ones put up in its

place. Had I *seen* the rooms before I engaged them I shouldn't have taken a place with such a desolate outlook; but as we've had the expense of coming here, I don't mind staying if you undertake to have the beds changed; and they must both be feather beds, too. Now, can you do this?"

"I'm afraid I can't!" I said. "But if——"

"There can be no ifs: I put everything quite clearly in my letter. I've got a copy of it here. I wrote——"

"My dear lady, if you will sit down in that easy-chair, we'll make everything still clearer." She was beginning to prance around the room.

Dear, unmoved, was having a very thorough wash. So the light sleeper sank into the chair and rummaged in her hand-bag, presumably for the copy of the letter in question.

I tried to speak as lightly and soothingly as possible, for she was fairly bursting with indignation! "Now, please understand that I am delighted to give a meal to any wayfarer who, like yourself, arrives hungry and tired at my door. I'm glad for them to come in and have a rest, and even a wash and brush up, if they want it. But, when an absolute stranger, of whom I know nothing, demands my own bed, and my feather bed into the bargain, then I must protest! That feather bed is one of my most cherished possessions!"

"But you expected me?"—sitting bolt upright.

"I certainly did not!"

"Didn't I write and tell you we would arrive to-day?"

"I've neither heard of you, nor from you, in my life before!"

"But this is Rosemary Cottage?"

"It is."

"Then you *must* be Miss Flabbers!"—with an air of finality.

"I'm sorry, but I'm *not!*"

At this, Dear dropped the soap with a sudden splosh into the water and looked round in frozen astonishment. (The merest wraith of it remained two hours later when Abigail emptied the water. It was a new cake, too!)

At the name of Flabbers, light came. Miss Flabbers is a gentlewoman in somewhat reduced circumstances, who lives in a cottage a good mile and a half away. Presumably she was going to add to her income by taking in boarders.

"If it's Miss Flabbers whom you are wanting," I continued, filling up a painful silence, "her house is called Rose May Cottage. I expect you got the names confused in your mind."

"There! It's all *your* fault," said the ample one, turning irritably to her companion; "you said it was Rose May Cottage when you read

the first letter: but I said that was an absurd name, and it must be Rosemary it was intended for—country people *do* write so badly. I do *wish*, dear, you would be careful to be more accurate; if only you had said the right name I might have been saved all this trouble—and expense, because of course I shall *insist* on paying for our tea——" (she didn't though!) "and think how many miles I've walked, and now I suppose I've to do it all again. How I wish I'd listened to that old man at the station and gone with——"

She paused suddenly and threw up her hands; and then there arose that cry common to all womankind the world over, when they are weary with their pilgrimage, footsore and travel-stained; the cry that must have rent the air in the olden days when Sarai trailed after Abram across the plains of Mamre, even as it sounds to-day from Yokohama to Land's End:

"*Where's our luggage?*"

There was a perceptible gasp—and then, "Yes; *where's our luggage?*" faintly echoed Dear, as she nervously clutched her gloves with feverish haste and pinned them on her head, and then wildly tried to get her arms into her hat.

"I expect it's reposing peacefully in Miss Flabbers' best bedroom," I said assuringly. "At any rate it isn't *here!*" as I saw signs that they

were going to crawl under the bed in search of it. "The man would be sure to deliver it there, and——"

Abigail knocked at the door and asked if she could speak to me for a minute.

When I got outside she said, "There's a person downstairs wants to see you *particular*, ma'am, or I wouldn't have disturbed you." Abigail divides all her sex into two classes, "persons" and "ladies," and no one is more careful than she to see that "persons" don't think more highly of themselves than their social status warrants.

I found a pleasant-faced woman who lives in a cottage near Miss Flabbers. "Please, ma'am, Miss Flabbers has lost two ladies rather suddint, and I wondered if you'd chanced to set eyes on 'em? Miss Flabbers is *that* worrit as never was; expected 'em by the eleven train, and I misdoubt me if the cutlets won't be a bit heavy by now, though she's had 'em over a saucepan of hot water ever since. She's so upset she don't know what to do, yet she can't go out to look for 'em in case they turns up meanwhile. I thought it 'ud be just neighbourly if I went out for her and hunted around. I know they come by that train, for I see'd 'em myself at the station, puffeck ladies you'd have took 'em for, only they wouldn't have a fly. They're not friends, no, nor boarders, no, she wouldn't think of having

boarders, so reserved as she is; they're what's called paying guests. I know, because my son's got a friend in the *Hargus* office, and he told him about an adver-*tise*ment she put in, only you wouldn't have known it was her, being only X Y Z on it, but the people at the *Hargus* knew as the X Y Z meant her, though *how* they should know puzzles me, and they send on the letters to her. But she's kep' it very private; no one knew they was coming, so I wouldn't dream of mentioning X Y Z to a soul. I've tracked 'em up here. Everybody all over the Common and even up to the Crag Farm has a-seed them, they've scoured the county for miles round. You'd be sure to rekernize them once you'd saw them——"

I should think so! E'en the slight harebell raised its head and stared after them whenever they passed it that afternoon, I'm certain.

By dint of shouting above her talking I managed to get her to hear that I had them safe and sound; and should be everlastingly grateful if she would take them off my hands and place them in the safe keeping of Miss Flabbers.

Then I fetched them down and introduced the neighbourly soul, who, you could see, felt elated at the distinction of being the one to take such costumes in tow.

"Better go out of the back door," I said,

"and up the garden to the top gate; it will save you a few steps."

And then the ample one turned and said icily, "I suppose we must thank you for what you have done; but I *do* think you should have told us *sooner* who you were." Yet I hadn't told them even then!

It was as they were going out of the back door that Dear amazed us by falling unexpectedly to her knees and affectionately clasping a dark object that I had not seen in the dim recess of the lobby.

"*Here's* our trunks!" she shrieked hysterically.

And then both those women glared things unspeakable at me. They knew now, what they had only suspected before, that I was a deeply-dyed villainess with designs on them and their property.

"What's this? Why wasn't I told about it?" I inquired of Abigail, who, naturally, was not missing a word.

"Old Bob brought them while you were busy. He said they were for here, so of course I took them in, madam, as you said you were not to be disturbed," with an injured sniff, "and I've had no opportunity to tell you since."

The two, true to the instincts of their sex, had promptly seated themselves on the trunks, and I

feared they had no intention of budging unless the trunks went with them. But the neighbourly person was anxious to be on the move; she wanted the *kudos* of walking through the village with them in the broad daylight, so she said—

"They'll be all right; my 'usband'll come round for them soon as we get back. Now don't you worrit the least little bit."

Thus they were got off at last.

"Puffeck ladies," I said to myself as I seized the brown pitcher and the water-can, and went out to the spring.

VIII

Merely to be Prepared

I COULDN'T have been asleep many minutes (though, when I come to think of it, no one ever is, in London), because I had waited up till eleven for Abigail.

It was like this: the day before, cook had asked me if she might stay out till eleven that night, as she wanted to go and see an old lady in whose employ she had once been. The old lady was seriously ill; she couldn't get her off her mind; and she felt she ought to give her what little pleasure she could, as she wouldn't be likely to get over it.

I begged her to take the whole afternoon; such affection was really touching. I saw myself in a few years' time, decrepit, aged, and infirm, being visited by a crowd of devoted retainers, who murmured one to another:

"She had her faults, goodness knows, but at least we will scatter seeds of kindness!"

In any case, I was pleased for cook to take some extra time, as she is invariably home early —the Naval Division at the Crystal Palace have to be under glass by nine o'clock.

She thanked me, but declined the afternoon, as she thought half-past nine or ten in the evening would suit the old lady best; she was in a West End nursing home. It seemed late to

visit one who was so aged and so ill, but, of course, I gave the extended leave.

She returned at 10.55, looking very bright, a bunch of roses in her coat-belt, a box of chocolates dangling from her finger, and a programme in her hand.

Yes, thank you; she had had a lovely time. The old lady?—er—oh, yes! she was getting on nicely, thank you.

Next day, Abigail came to me, also asking for an eleven o'clock leave. It transpired that she was expecting a little orphan cousin to arrive that night from Blackpool; *such* a sad affair—child left without a father when it was only four years old—she was eight now. No, she hadn't ever seen the little cousin, but she felt it was such a distressing case that it was her duty to do what she could.

I hinted that eleven o'clock at night seemed rather late for one who was so young and so orphaned to be up and about, and likewise offered her the afternoon. But she said the train didn't arrive sooner, and the trains were often late. So I gave her till 11.0 p.m. to welcome the pitiful orphan.

She also arrived in at night looking radiant. Under her mackintosh she was wearing a pink chiffon dress, edged with swansdown; a bandeau of sparkles was on her hair, a horseshoe of the

same make adorning the back of her head; she carried a fan, and some flowers that had evidently been worn on the dress.

I am glad to say that she, too, had enjoyed herself immensely, and the desolate relative had been most pleased to make her acquaintance.

After that I retired.

And then I conclude it was the bang that did it; at any rate, the whole household woke with a start, and with one accord the feminine portion precipitated itself downstairs and on to the front door mat, and peered out into the dark road in the hope of seeing *something!*

The masculine element, being gifted with a faculty for keeping cool, calm and collected in any emergency, stayed to gather up a few wraps and rugs and overcoats and anything else he could lay his hands on in the dark (including his disreputable old gardening jacket), which he brought down and distributed among us, as we had not stopped for much in the way of clothing.

At that moment Virginia and Ursula rushed along the road from their own house and joined us. Virginia was clad in a nightdress, with a mackintosh over it and a sumptuous pale blue kimono (covered with brown and black flying herons) on the top of the mac. Ursula was wearing her heliotrope dressing-gown, an ostrich feather boa, and an eiderdown quilt.

They both apologised for calling so late (it was past midnight), but said they felt they should just like to talk things over.

While I was bidding them welcome, Miss Quirker (from round the corner) appeared; likewise Miss Thresher (a secondary-school mistress) and her friend Mrs. Brash, who share a flat near by; and in the rear came Mrs. Ridley, the doctor's widow from across the road.

They all said they had come because they could see "it" better from my house, which stands on a high point, overlooking London one way, and Kent from the other side.

Each caller was grateful for the loan of a blanket.

Meanwhile, in far less time than it takes to write all this, fire-engines and ambulances, and policemen and motor-cars and pedestrians appeared as by magic from nowhere and went tearing along the road. Yet, crane our necks as we would, not a glimpse could we catch of "it."

Miss Quirker—who always seems to have special and exclusive information about everything—said the creature was exactly over her bedroom chimney when the bomb was dropped; she heard a strange whirring noise (described most graphically), and turned on the electric light for company; then there was a *brilliant* flash in the sky (yes, she could see it above the electric light), and the bomb fell—she was sure

it was in her back garden. She looked very pleased with herself and superior, to think that she had been singled out by Fate for this special and distinctive visitation.

The man of the house, after bidding us stay just where we were as he wouldn't be gone a minute, hied him buoyantly down the road in company with neighbouring masculines—to find the bomb, I suppose. He soon returned, however, with the exceedingly flat information that a gas explosion had occurred in a house further along, though they couldn't tell whether it was due to the geyser or the cooking-range, as they couldn't find either.

[Later on, the remains of a geyser and part of a porcelain bath were picked up about six miles off, in the Walworth Road; and I understand that the police at Sevenoaks found the remnants of an alien gas-stove wandering about in a suspicious manner, and promptly interned it. But this is by the way.]

"Only a gas explosion!" exclaimed everybody in doleful disappointment. Mrs. Brash certainly looked relieved; but then she is a very nervous little woman with a weak heart.

"Well, I call it *too* bad!" said Virginia. "Every solitary relative, friend, and acquaintance I possess, even to the third and fourth generation, has had a Zepp cross 'right over their very road'; and every person I've met during the last twelve

months boasts and brags of the way they've had them 'exactly above their heads.' And yet, do what I will, I can't get a sight of even the tail of one."

"Just my case," said everybody else in chorus; "I seem to be the only one in London who hasn't seen one."

But Miss Thresher cut short our bemoanings over the hardness of our lot, by saying in her head-mistress voice—

"I'm afraid an excess of untutored imagination is one of the weaknesses of this age. *We*, however, can console ourselves with the knowledge that at least we are *truthful;* and truth, after all, is the greater asset"—looking witheringly at Miss Quirker.

I replied, "How about some hot coffee?" It was the most appropriate remark that I could think of on the spur of the moment.

Cook promptly offered to get it, while I went after tea-gowns and dressing-gowns and similar symbols of propriety for our shivering guests, who looked a trifle nondescript now that the lights were on. The man of the house had returned to assist at the explosion.

If Miss Thresher hoped that her last remark would quelch Miss Quirker, she was mistaken; nothing can suppress that lady, and nothing is sacred to her. She will stalk up to your secret cupboard, no matter how boldly you may have

labelled it "strictly private," and drag out into broad daylight the most disreputable skeleton you keep in it, the one you packed away at the very back of the top shelf—and then be pained at your ingratitude!

As I entered the room with an armful of apparel I heard her saying to Miss Thresher, "Why don't you put a flounce on the bottom? Those cheap flannelettes always shrink in the wash. . . . Oh, flannel is it? . . . Really! no one would ever think you gave that much for it, would they? At any rate I couldn't sleep if I didn't have them right down around my feet."

To change the subject I asked Virginia why she had put her mac. on under her kimono, when obviously the correct order would have been to wear it outside.

She said she concluded it was sheer genius and originality made her do it, for she had never worn such a combination in her life before; and the same must have applied to Ursula, for, looking back on a varied and chequered career, she could never remember seeing her sister, even once, promenading the highway in an eiderdown before.

At the same time, she inquired why it was that *I* had stood for a quarter of an hour on that doormat, clasping feverishly to my chest a pair of satin slippers and a bath towel, and clinging

pathetically to a bedroom candlestick; when obviously any candle would have blown out had I attempted to light it, and the bedroom slippers would have been more usefully employed on my shoeless feet; while as for the bath towel. . . .!

The coffee came at that moment. I remembered that some time ago the kitchen had been very interested in an article in one of the dailies, giving various directions as to what should be done in the case of bombs overhead. I forget a good deal of it, but I remember you had to lay mattresses all over the top floors before you came downstairs, and you had to dip a cloth in hyposulphate of something, and hold it to your nose as you came down to seek a place of safety.

The servants were rather taken with the mattress idea, said how simple it was, and that, as they had five mattresses between them, they would cover a good deal of floor space. I even generously offered them the two off my own bed, if they would come down and fetch them as soon as the Zepps were heard, so long as they undertook to place them carefully above *my* head.

When Abigail brought in the trays, I asked how many mattresses she had laid down.

"I never gave 'em a thought," she owned up; "my two legs seemed all that mattered, for I was sure I saw the Zeppelin-thing looking straight in at my bedroom window—such sauce!"

"Untutored imagination again!" murmured Ursula in my ear.

Nervous little Mrs. Brash said that was just the difficulty; when it actually came to the point you could think of nothing that you ought to remember. Wouldn't it be well to talk the subject over and decide a few things—merely to be prepared—now that there was a group of us together.

Miss Thresher, who loves the importance of being in any sort of office, enthused over the idea; said we had better have a committee meeting there and then; to be forewarned was to be forearmed, she told us, with an impressive air of wisdom. She said she would be Minute Secretary, and we must draw up schedules stating definitely and clearly what a woman ought to do, first by way of preparation beforehand, and secondly when the crisis actually arrived.

Miss Quirker endorsed this, and remarked in an aggrieved tone (in my direction) that she should have thought the women's papers would have dealt comprehensively with so important a subject long ago. She added, however, that she thought "crisis" was far too respectable a name to give them; had she not been a staunch Churchwoman, she would have called them something far more vividly appropriate. I didn't hear the end of this, because I slipped away to find the

man of the house, as I had heard him return indoors.

Opening the study door, my eyes fell on such an upheaval that for the moment I felt certain a gas explosion must have been at work there. But no ! He explained (turning out yet another drawer) that he was only looking for some insurance policies, as he wasn't quite certain what was the attitude of the companies towards geysers. I pointed out that it didn't matter as we hadn't one ; but he went on looking, and his face wore that tense expression seen on most men when hunting for the family screwdriver, or the pair of black gloves kept for funerals. Having found the policies at last (in the drawer where they had always been kept, by the way), I left him in peace, to peruse them at his leisure.

The Ladies' Committee was well under way when I returned to the dining-room, and as is the correct thing at such gatherings, everybody was talking at once and on the most diverse topics. I consider myself rather great on ladies' committees ; I've even occupied the proud position of being in the chair, on occasion. And the more I see of them the more I am lost in admiration of the courage, versatility, and insuppressibility of my sex.

Why, there's no man living who could trail as many totally irrelevant topics across the

agenda, and in defiance of a politely pleading chairwoman too, as can the littlest and frailest woman at any ladies' committee you like to name.

As it was, the only one who seemed within a hundred miles of Zeppelins was poor Mrs. Brash, who was explaining to Mrs. Ridley—

"It isn't that I mind dying: we all have to die *some* day: but I do prefer to die *whole*."

Of course the doctor's widow pooh-poohed this as nonsense, and asked severely what would become of surgeons if everybody felt like *that!*

Miss Thresher couldn't find a suitable heading for her schedule, till Ursula suggested "Anti-zeptics." Mrs. Ridley thought the medical profession might not approve of the unprofessional use of the word; but it was accepted by the majority, and then we all settled down whole-heartedly to attack the problem from every point of view—which included, among other things, borax as a preventive for moth, Queen Mary's graciousness, a comparison of the respective merits of local butchers, economising on corsets, and the War Loan.

Perhaps you can't see how these came in, but it was simple enough. Miss Quirker said that, after all, explosions that you thought were Zeppelins weren't so bad if they enabled you to get such good coffee as mine; and might she have a third lump of sugar, please? it was such

a treat to get a really sweet cup of coffee; she had given up sugar at home as she was economising on it.

Being the hostess, I couldn't exactly tell her that I, too, was trying to economise on mine.

From the high price of sugar we naturally floated on to the ruinous tendencies of butcher's meat, and Mrs. Brash explained the trouble she had with her butcher because he wouldn't send home all the bones.

Mrs. Ridley had similar harrowments to relate about her butcher, but his vice took the form of sticking to the trimmings from the joints, which she was sure he sold at a good price for soap-making, now that fat was so scarce and soap likely to be dear. She knew it because—as she reminded us—she was the treasurer of the "Women's League for Encouraging the Troops to Wash," and it came very hard on their funds. What it would cost them for the cakes of soap they were going to send out no one would believe! (No, they hadn't sent any yet; but of course they were going to, when they got enough members, and, by the way, would *I* join?)

She didn't mind a fair charge, of course (we all murmured agreement). War was war, and we must expect to pay something extra to help the King keep going; he had his family to provide for like any other man. Neither did she grudge one solitary penny that went to Lord

Kitchener (hearty applause). No, indeed! But what made her blood boil was to feel that she was actually washing her hands with her own ribs—and at one-and-threepence-halfpenny a pound, too!

Virginia suggested she should try a rather less heating soap; but she was drowned by Miss Thresher, who said firmly, "Borax; that's what you ought to send to the troops. Not only would it soften the water for them, poor things—and no one knows better than I do what awfully hard stuff that German water is; nearly scraped my skin off when I went up the Rhine two years ago—but they would find it so useful to put in with their woollen things that we've been knitting them, to keep out the moth."

My reminder that our troops were not as yet, alas! drawing their water from German cisterns was unnoticed; for the mere mention of moth produced extraordinary animation. Was borax good? Weren't they a perfect nuisance? and so on. I said I always put it in with my furs, and never had a moth near them.

"I wonder if that's what they put with Queen Mary's furs," said Mrs. Brash. "I never saw more lovely sables than those she had on when she came to the hospital yesterday."

Miss Thresher verified this last statement, absolutely superb they were, and Miss Thresher

had a right to speak, for the Queen had bowed straight at her, as she stood on the kerb, "as near to her as I am to you."

Miss Quirker said that for her part she didn't think there was another woman in the world so gracious as Queen Mary—except of course Queen Alexandra. She would bow to anyone she saw, no matter *how* shabby they were.

Mrs. Brash hurriedly said what she so much admired in Queen Alexandra was her figure.

Miss Quirker continued, "Yes, and speaking of corsets I want to tell you of another economy besides doing without sugar to help the nation. You should buy your corsets several sizes larger than usual, and then when they are getting worn, you can turn them upside down and wear them the other way up. It's so saving."

Ursula said she quite believed it, because she knew, if she turned her long corsets upside down, they would reach high enough up to support the military collar at the back of her neck, and thus save boning.

I felt it was high time we got back to "Antizeptics," and suggested that we should put something in the first column of the schedule, which was headed: "Things to place in readiness beforehand."

Mrs. Brash announced that she wasn't ever going to take her clothes off any more till the

war was over, if this was the sort of goings-on we were to expect.

General opinion, however, was decidedly in favour of, at any rate, removing the outside frock, simply because we none of us saw any prospect of ever being able to afford to buy a new one.

Then we all said what we thought ought to go into that column. Woollen undies, a fur-lined coat, a thick dressing-gown, a raincoat, a travelling rug, and all sorts of other things, were to be placed *close to the bedside*. This was insisted upon as a matter of the greatest importance; otherwise, in the dark, we should never find anything, and of course it wouldn't be safe to have a light.

Miss Thresher and Miss Quirker had a small sub-committee on the subject of stockings—should they be worn all night in bed? Miss Thresher said obviously it was the only sensible course. Miss Quirker objected that she should kick hers off in her sleep in any case, hers was such a delicate skin (as a child people had always remarked on it), though probably women less sensitive than herself might be able to endure them. But if she lost hers among the bedclothes she would never find them in the dark.

Eventually they compromised by agreeing to safety-pin a pair to the front of the nightdress (as they fasten your handkerchief to you in the

hospital), so that at least they would know where to find them in case of precipitate flight.

Meanwhile the question, "Should hats be worn?" necessitated Ursula and Mrs. Brash going into another sub-committee on the lounge. Mrs. Brash favoured a shawl—preferably white—being draped over the head; it was more suited to the *négligé* condition of the hair. This led her to consult Ursula about the winter's hat she was evolving. She had had an *exceedingly* good white and black crinoline hat the summer before last, and the winter before last she had had a *very* lovely violet velvet toque—the rich deep colour favoured by Queen Alexandra.

Last winter she had taken the violet velvet from the hat of the winter before, and put it over the crinoline hat of the summer before (you can follow this, I hope?), and everybody had admired it. Now she proposed to return the violet velvet to its original toque, only this time she would smother it with some violets she had by her, and she had a really beautiful little sable skin which she proposed to put round the brim. Did Miss Ursula think the violets and the fur would combine well?

Ursula said she herself didn't care for fur and flowers in combination, because she always associated sables with snowy northern regions, whereas violets suggested soft spring days and awakening woods and gardens.

Mrs. Brash, who had never thought of putting things together in that way before, said how very poetic it was. Then would Miss Ursula think that quills would look better? After all, birds and flowers went together.

Ursula agreed, and added that she had even found the neighbours' fowls scratting up the white violets one day. Mrs. Brash seemed to feel that was conclusive proof of the desirability of the combination. And in that case, should the quills tilt outwards or inwards? No, she didn't mean inside the hat, of course, but across the top or off the head? . . . Yes, perhaps it would be the best to tilt them backwards, and she should fasten them with a large cameo that had belonged to the late Mr. Brash's mother (prolific details as to the grasping character of Mrs. Brash, senior, who had never given her a thing except this cameo).

Finally, she aired her only anxiety—would the shape of the winter-before-last toque still be worn this winter? Ursula assured her that the shapes of the winter-before-last will be worn till the war is over, and by that time we shall have become so attached to them that we shall refuse to part with them.

After we had collected a fairly comprehensive pile of clothes—including most we possessed—and placed it all close beside the bed, jewellery

came under discussion. Naturally no one wanted to lose even the smallest tiara, and we were all quite sure the Government wouldn't include jewellery in the insurance. So we collected our trinkets and placed them on top of the garments. It was astonishing how much we each seemed to possess, and how careful we were to enumerate it all. Mrs. Brash enlarged tearfully and at great length on the diamond necklace her late husband had given her.

This opened up a wider question. How about silver plate? Yes, how about the silver? each one echoed. Was it likely we were going to hand over our teapots, shoelifts, candlesticks, pin-boxes, spoons and forks, hair-brushes, entrée-dishes, and photo-frames to the enemy? No, indeed not! So we all lugged our plate-chests to the bedside; though Miss Thresher said she should put hers all into a laundry bag and hang it on the bedpost; it would be easier to carry that way.

Then a number of side issues cropped up. Virginia had just invested in the War Loan; there was her scrip. Mrs. Brash couldn't think of leaving behind the portrait of her great-grand-uncle, the admiral (always thus referred to, as though no other had ever existed), whereupon we all remembered we had ancestral portraits calling for preservation—after all, it doesn't look well if you haven't!

Miss Quirker decided she would take the bedspread she had crocheted for their forthcoming Red Cross bazaar (but didn't intend to give it to them now it was finished; it was far too pretty. Besides, the secretary had only put her name in small type among "other ladies helping" below the stallholders, and just think how she had slaved over that bazaar!).

Mrs. Ridley said that whatever else went, she meant at all costs to save the presentation clock given to her late husband by a very celebrated patient, whose name she was not at liberty to state. I'm inclined to think this was mentioned as a set-off against Mrs. Brash's diamond necklace; the late Mr. Brash, though an admirable husband, did not seem to have generated anything remarkable in the way of public esteem, whereas the late Dr. Ridley was known to be anything but generous.

Mrs. Ridley had no diamonds; but the clock was of solid granite, made on the model of a pyramid. It was surmounted by a coy-looking sphinx, representing about a quarter of a hundredweight of bronze metal. Accompanying the pyramid—one at each end of the mantelpiece—was a pair of heavy granite obelisks (like Cleopatra's Needle, but just a size smaller). It took both the servants to lift the clock every time the mantelpiece was dusted, Mrs. Ridley explained with pride. Besides, the obelisks were

very useful to hang her knitting bag on, and so appropriate too, with our brave lads out there rallying round and defending the poor sphinx from the Turks. (Virginia whispered in my ear, it was no wonder the bronze lady looked so cheerful.)

So of course these weighty items joined the jewellery at the bedside.

Other valuables rapidly suggested themselves also more sordid things, such as matches and candles, a tin of biscuits, and a small stove and kettle, for use if we had to sit out in the road all night gazing at a ruined home.

And of course we placed pails of sand and buckets of water close at hand, to use if it should be an incendiary bomb. (I hoped I shouldn't hop out of bed straight into the water!)

Here Ursula reminded me that the pile of sand placed on the platform of our London station several months (or was it years?) ago, for Anti-zeptic treatment, was now sprouting luscious grass; obviously the lawn-mower and garden-roller must be added to the bedside museum.

But I told her afterwards, she had better keep quiet if she lacks the ability to grasp the strenuosity of any situation where a group of conscientious women are conversing on the subject of "doing something." As it was, her remark only incited Miss Quirker to spend a tedious five minutes in explaining to her how

impossible it would be for a single woman, with only one maid, to get the garden-roller upstairs, and another ten in giving her recipes for exterminating grass; while Mrs. Ridley went off at a tangent on the shortage of gardeners, and the advantages of paraffin over fish-oil as a lubricant for mowing-machines.

I only succeeded in getting her back to the agenda, by begging her to advise us, as she was such an authority on paraffin, whether to take an oil-stove or a spirit-lamp for the outdoor encampment.

At length, when any ordinary bedroom must have been packed quite full, and suggestive of a furniture depository, Virginia's voice rose above the babel—

"But what I want to know is, how am I ever going to get into bed?"

"You may well ask!" said her sister. "Look at the time! Just you come along home with me. I'll show you. Where's my eider-down?'

Miss Thresher besought them to stay a few minutes longer, merely to decide what to do when the Zeppelins actually arrived. But Ursula said they had got all their work cut out to get through the preparatory stages of the schedule.

So the Committee adjourned.

As they went out, a figure came out of the

kitchen side entrance and made for the coach-house, carrying a big cardboard box.

"Is anything the matter, Abigail?" I asked.

"No'm! I'm only hiding all our best hats in the stable; I expect they'll be less likely to find them there."

"But the Zepps aren't exactly like burglars!" I said.

"No, I suppose they're not," she replied, "but when a creature like that Kaiser gets nosing about among *the stars*, as well as trying to rampage all over the earth, there's no telling *what* he'll be up to next. It's as well to be prepared."

IX

Where the Road Led Over the Hills

Next morning I was a wreck. Virginia and her sister were the same.

For a week past I had realised that I was in the last stage of mental and physical disrepair. The midnight committee was the final straw.

As a rule, I stick at work in town till nerves and brain refuse to hold out another day; then, flinging my tools down, and leaving both my office desk and my study table in a hopeless and bewildering state of piled-up letters, MSS. and proofs, I just fly—a goodly bale of arrears following me by next post.

I had had practically no holiday owing to the war, and had reached that forlorn and useless frame of mind when I declared I was far too busy to take one—a very mistaken notion for anyone to have, by the way; it is surprising how well most of us can be done without when we do at last take a little time off duty!

However, I had just one faint glimmer of common sense left me, and that told me to take the first train going west next morning, which I did, leaving Paddington (in company with Virginia and Ursula, who had a holiday due to

her from the hospital) in a warm close fog that might imply a thunderstorm, or an early autumn, or merely the ordinary airless carbonic-acid gloom that is a distinguishing feature of London. Some eminent authority has said that the air in London hasn't been changed for over a hundred years, and I can quite believe it!

We found the cottage bathed in the glow of the soft sunshine that is still summer, but that brings with it the first touch of regret for the good-bye that is near at hand. There had been some soaking rains after a dry spell, and everything in the garden was holding up bright, refreshed leaves, and glowing flowers, one and all assuring me that though they had a gasping time a few weeks before, and had wondered from day to day if they could manage to hold on till the evening, things had now taken a glorious turn for the better; and they were glad they hadn't given up, since I was so pleased to see them.

Several apologised for ragged washed-out blossoms lower down their stem, but explained that it was due to the rain, and that they were sending up new ones to take the place of the shabby ones as quickly as ever they could.

The dear things seemed to look at me with such understanding sympathy; the pansies held up their bright little faces just like a bevy of inquiring children; the hollyhocks, I am sure, turned round to look in my direction; the last

of the sweet peas threw out tender little fingers to touch my arm as I passed beside their hedge; the golden rod stretched its neck and tiptoed lest I should miss it at the back of the border.

Haven't you noticed that most flowers seem to have faces? I don't mean that you can trace a direct resemblance to human features in them as you can in the moon; but there is something in the flowers that looks at you—something that looks at you shyly, as the wild rose; or stares at you boldly, like the marigold; or twinkles at you gaily, like the cornflower and coreopsis; or appears slightly inclined to frivolity, like the larkspur and the ragged robin; or takes life with solid seriousness, like the Canterbury bell; or gives you the innocent look of a baby, like the primrose; or beams at you with large-hearted maternal kindness, like a big gloire de Dijon.

Most flowers, you will find, give you a look with some definite characteristic—at least, so it seems to me. Probably that is one reason why they are so comforting and companionable.

And I was wanting something comforting and companionable that day. I had overworked and generally neglected the rules of common sense, till I had got to that dismal pitch that simply asks of blank space, "What's the good of anything?"

Then more questions began to worry me.

What had Christianity accomplished, seeing

the way the Sermon on the Mount was being trampled under foot by the instigators of this war? After all, wasn't might going to win, in spite of all one believed of the supremacy of right? Wasn't the devil having things all his own way now? What were Christians doing? Had religion lost its power? What were the churches doing? Was *anybody* doing *anything* worth whiles?

Those who have let themselves run down physically, and have neglected to take proper meals, and have turned night into day, and have tried systematically to cram a fortnight's work into every week, know exactly where one finds oneself at the end of a few months.

And it is only the very exceptional people who do not find their spiritual condition about as jaded as their nerves after a course of this sort of thing. We get to feel that we are ploughing a very lone furrow, and it is only a step further to the state of mind that says it isn't worth ploughing at all.

Personal experience has taught me that there is only one cure for me when I get to this state of nervous wreckage; and that is to get away to the solitudes; to listen among the great silences of the hills for the still small Voice that has never failed those who wait for its Message.

God's methods of restoring weary humanity

are many and various. Sometimes He sees that first and foremost, like Elijah, His tired children need rest and food. And just as one of the greatest terrors that can befall the worn-out worker in a city is insomnia, so one of the greatest boons that Nature in her quietudes bestows is the ability to drop off into peaceful, brain-mending oblivion.

So He giveth His beloved sleep.

Or it may be that He sees His children need to be drawn away from the world for a while, in order to talk face to face with Him. Sometimes we have to be brought to a state of great weakness before we will listen to His plea: "Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile." We do not always heed it when we are well and strong. In the enforced quiet we can find time to turn to Him.

And a sojourn with our Lord in the desert has meant for many the feeding of five thousand on the morrow.

When I am badly in the depths, I know of no surer way to restore my mind than a long walk across the hills. Some people need human companionship; but, personally, I can do very well by myself under such circumstances (always provided that I don't meet a cow likewise on a walking tour). I can pull myself together more quickly if I don't have to spend time and energy

striving to be amiable and politely attentive to someone.

I have often started out on a Sunday morning, and walked on till I came upon some unknown church that served as a useful end to my pilgrimage. On one occasion I remember dis covering a small chapel hidden away among a few homesteads in a pretty valley I unexpectedly tumbled into. They were starting the first hymn as I entered. There were nine of us all told, including the preacher, the two ladies who raised two different tunes simultaneously, and the rugged-faced deacon or elder, who brought me a hymnbook and, later, took the collection.

The singing was not a marked success at first, owing partly to the divided opinion of the congregation as to which tune they were really singing; moreover, my entrance had momentarily diverted attention and seemed to make all concerned a trifle nervous. But at length the preacher himself started a third tune that we all knew and were able to join in; and a very sincere and devout service followed.

I gathered from information impressed upon us in the course of the sermon (probably for my special benefit, as the handful of cottagers assembled would assuredly know) that there was to be a special collection that day on behalf of some chapel fund.

When I told this to Ursula, who didn't then

know so much about our hill-people as she does now, she said, "Ah! I suppose that was why only nine came!"

But, in reality, nine was not at all a poor congregation for a tiny hamlet like this on a Sunday morning. The mothers are mostly at home getting dinner; the fathers are seeing to the stock, and don't reckon to get themselves "cleaned up" till the afternoon. But in the evening—then the little building would be packed to the door.

In his final prayer the minister prayed so earnestly that we might all be induced to give with the greatest liberality, that I felt exceedingly sorry I had only put a half-crown into my glove when I started out, leaving my purse at home.

The rugged elder looked studiously in the opposite direction while I slipped the coin on to the plate; somehow I hoped he wouldn't be too disappointed when he discovered that the respectable-looking stranger had not given more handsomely after the pleading of the preacher. But it was all I had.

After the service I lingered a moment to read a quaint old tombstone in the church precincts. The rest of the worshippers likewise lingered—respectful but curious—in the road outside the gate. The preacher had shaken hands with me at the door; my rugged friend had been immersed

in the duties of his office as steward, treasurer, and church secretary combined. But now he came out of the door, looked anxiously about, and seeing me still there, made straight for me. I concluded that he, too, was going to shake hands, and possibly inquire if I was staying in the neighbourhood. But what he actually said was this—

"Excuse me, ma'am, but do you happen to know what you put into the plate?"

"A half-crown," I faltered, wondering whether by any remote chance it was a bad one.

He nodded his head, and, opening his work-hardened hand, displayed the morning's collection —seven pennies, three halfpennies, and my half-crown on top.

"That's right," he nodded. And then, lowering his voice, presumably to save my feelings, he added, "But if 'twas a mistake, and you didn't mean to put in all that, *you can have it back.*"

Do you know, it made a lump come in my throat.

I told Ursula about it at dinner, remarking that it looked as though they hadn't much faith even though they had specially prayed for generous giving.

Ursula said that in *her* opinion it looked as though it was high time I presented to the rag-

bag the hat I had worn that morning, since it had been for months past a dejected object of pity, though with her usual delicacy of feeling she had, up to the present, refrained from telling me so in plain English. But now, in all kindness such as only a dear friend can show, she had no hesitation is saying that she wasn't at all surprised that they mistook me for an old age pensioner on the verge of bankruptcy.

But I've been wandering again. To return to that September day when I reached the cottage as weary of life and as downhearted about everything as any mortal could well be. The whole world seemed out of joint. Yet in my innermost soul I knew that religion was really all right, and that it was I who had gone wrong. But I refused to look at that aspect of it.

Next day I determined to give it all up, and just meditated on my own funeral. I tried to reckon up how many people I could really rely on to send wreaths; it didn't make me feel any the less pessimistic when I decided there were only four who could be counted upon as certainties, and they included Virginia and Ursula!

And even one of these failed me; for when I mentioned the matter to the girls, they said: Surely I didn't imagine they were going to be so wasteful as to send *two* wreaths, when one would do quite as well if both their names

appeared on the card attached? But they did offer to make it a wreath of painted-white-tin flowers, under a glass shade (regardless of expense), if I preferred, suggesting that I might get longer pleasure out of a wreath of this kind.

Getting no more consolation from them than this, I said I would go for a walk. Virginia and Ursula anticipated my wishes and declined to accompany me. They had urgent work on hand that was far too important to postpone for a mere walk. It was the planting of onion seed.

The week before we had read in the papers how imperative it was that everybody should plant food crops in any available scrap of ground they might possess, to help keep starvation at bay.

We read the article eagerly.

I had several acres of land doing nothing in particular at the moment, that I was only too glad to use for a special crop of eatables against the time of national famine. Without finishing the article, we had started to discuss what would be best to lay down, taking into account the idiosyncrasies of our digestions.

"Green peas in the small field adjoining the orchard," Ursula had decided for me; and then she proceeded: "Broad beans in half of the upper garden; scarlet runners at the back of the strawberry beds and along by the south wall; the potato garden can now have carrots, parsnips,

turnips and beets; the west garden must have pickled cabbage (I mean the cabbage before it is pickled), shallots, spring onions and pickling onions, chives——"

"What *are* 'chives'?" interrupted Virginia.

"I don't know, but I've read the name somewhere. Don't interrupt me."

"And fennel—that will come in handy for fish—and leeks. In that piece of waste ground beyond the barn I think we ought to plant asparagus, because, after all, there is no need to dispense with luxuries if you can grow them for nothing, is there?

"And how would it be to plant maize all down that bed where you had the Shirley poppies? I should think the same aspect would suit the two, and some green corn would be very nice. I suppose, if you plant it now, it will be about right in January or February, wouldn't it? Or you could sell it. It's twopence halfpenny or threepence a cob at the Stores. So if you had, say, fifty plants, and if each produced—how many *do* they produce on a plant? . . . Oh, well, if you don't know, let's be on the safe side and say one each—that would be a clear profit of—well, at threepence each—let's see, fifty pence is four and twopence, and three times would be—twelve and sixpence—say twelve shillings, allowing sixpence for seed. So that would be well worth trying, in case the moratorium never ends.

Then there would have to be cabbages and suchlike. How about digging up the orchard, and——"

"Oh, yes," said Virginia scornfully (she had picked up the paper and read to the end of the aforementioned article, which had proved very enlightening). "And I suppose you expect it all to grow under a couple of feet of snow. Let me tell you that it is now too late to plant anything but onions! He, she, or it, who wrote this article, says so."

I myself had been going to tell her, when I could get a word in, that it was too late for most of the things she had named.

But Ursula, who had never done any vegetable gardening, was still sceptical. That was why I suggested that we should consult the obliging manager at Carter's, in Queen Victoria Street as we often did over our gardening woes.

Just ahead of us in the shop, when we got there, was an elderly gentleman who wanted some grass seed; he asked if they would tell him how to start a lawn next spring.

It was in the middle of the day—a very busy time for a shop of this kind, when city men are on their way to or from lunch, and seize a few extra minutes to buy their seeds. The shop was full—it looked as though every scrap of land within the twelve-mile radius was going to be put under cultivation—and the assistants had all

their work to serve everyone as quickly as they wanted to be served.

The Elderly Gentleman was apparently the only one who was not in a hurry; so he asked the most minute questions, and the manager gave him copious directions, from preparing the ground at the start, right up to marking it off for tennis, when it was in its prime (though, judging by the small packet of seed the E. G. had bought, the lawn would never support a tennis-net).

Then by the time the shop was quite packed, and when everything that was possible appeared to have been said about planting and maintaining a lawn—including keeping it free from moss, the best way to trim the edges, the law with regard to trespassing fowls, and the careful tying of black cotton over the newly-planted seeds to keep off the birds—the E. G. asked what he should do when daisies came up? The manager said patiently that his firm's grass seeds didn't produce daisies; but as the E. G. seemed to worry about daisies, he was told how to get rid of daisies.

At last he really went, reluctantly, I admit; but the other customers—who had all become so engrossed in his lawn that they couldn't remember what they had come in to buy for themselves—heaved a sigh of relief.

Slowly he made his way to the middle of the

wide crossing just in front of the shop. You knew by his hesitating walk that there was another question he had meant to ask, but he couldn't recall it for the moment.

Yes! He suddenly turned round briskly (and nearly ended the lawn under a taxi), the shop-door opened again, and an anxious voice inquired, "What ought I to do if the birds get at the seeds in spite of the black cotton and the bits of white rag tied to them?"

The manager passed his hand across what looked like an aching brow, and further braced himself to do his duty; but a gentleman customer came to the rescue by replying, "It is usual, in such a case, sir, to buy another packet of grass seed, and start all over again on exactly the same lines as before, only you plant an extra reel of black cotton this time."

After this we were able to inquire of the manager what crops he would advise us to plant as our contribution to the nation's larder, to say nothing of our own.

"Onions," he said, so promptly that one would have thought others had asked the same question. And then added—"Giant Rocca."

I am not sure how many pounds of seed Ursula immediately ordered; she proposed to make it a present to me, and naturally wished to be generous. Virginia says she believes she heard her say a half-a-hundredweight. Anyhow

the obliging manager asked, with a slight cough, how large a portion of ground we were intending to cultivate, as half an ounce would be sufficient for—I forget how many acres! So she reduced her order to half a pound. She said she didn't want us to run short. (I don't fancy we shall, either!) Besides, she rather liked the name "Giant Rocca." It suggested something large and strengthening wherewith to combat the foe.

We hadn't a moment's rest after we arrived at the cottage until the onion seed was well underground. Ursula decided that it would be really a blessing if I *would* go out—she could then plant in peace.

The handy man being unable to "oblige" me by doing a little work just then, she had decided to plant the seeds herself.

At first she had made long troughs in which to place the seed, sprinkling it very finely with thumb and finger; but after half an hour of this spine-breaking work she straightened her back with difficulty, and decided that to "sow broadcast" was more in accordance with Nature herself, to say nothing of Biblical teaching. Hence we had it broadcast.

Here I may say that we eventually had Giant Roccas sown the length and breadth of the vegetable garden, in between the rows of spring greens, as well as in open spaces; also

they are sending up their spears between rows of snapdragons; round standard rose-trees; in the beds usually devoted to Darwin tulips; down the narrow bed that has Persian irises in the centre and double daisies at the edge; in the rough bed of foxgloves at the back of the pigsty, along the edge of the borders where sweet alyssum bloomed in the summer; under the damson tree where the ground is bare; along by the south wall, where the sweet pea remains were pulled up to make room for them; among the raspberry canes; all over the potato-patch; along with the carnation cuttings in the cold frame; in little dibbles among the strawberry plants; and I even found a few pots, each with a bit of glass over the top, placed in the sunny scullery window, which also proved to be "Giant Roccas," in case we should run short indoors.

When all these Roccas have attained to their gigantic proportions, I fancy we shall be able to scent that garden a mile or two away!

Still, the onions were only being planted the day I set out for a walk, wandering just where the road might chance to lead me. But you have to take yourself with you, if you go for a walk, and it is some time before you can get away from yourself—if you can make out what I mean by this.

I merely walked on and on, looking at the

blackbirds gobbling down the red mountain ash berries, till one gasped at their stowing-away capacity; at the swallows practising their long sweeping flights preparatory to leaving us; at the ferns growing out of the shady side of the walls; at a great patch of rich purple in the corner of a field—that turned out to be a wide-spread tangle of flowering vetch; at the beautiful colour effect of massed heliotrope Michaelmas daisies against the grey-green background of a mossy fern-decked old stone wall; at the hare-bells swinging in the wind; at the late foxgloves, still poking beautiful spikes of colour through the hedges; at the blackberries trailing over everything; at the butterflies still flitting about, or resting motionless with outspread wings where they found a warm sunny stone, or gorging themselves to repletion on some over-ripe pears that had fallen by the roadside. There were several lovely creatures with blue-black wings marked with red, white and a little blue, who, like the wasps, were actually intoxicated with pear juice!

A fox slunk across the road right in front of me, and plunged into a wood; probably having the time of his life just now, with most of the hunt somewhere in France.

The springs were coming to life again, after the heavy rain, and water burbled along at the side of the lane, or tumbled out from the rocks at the roadside in tiny waterfalls.

The orchard trees were flecked all over with gold, or pale yellow, or bright crimson—surely we never had a more abundant apple year than this one.

It was such a wonderful afternoon: I was bound to go on wandering.

At last I came to the end of the lanes and found myself on an open hilltop. As the fresh bracing air met me full in the face, I began to feel hungry. I looked at my watch: it was five o'clock. I looked at the landscape, and realised that, though I didn't know where I was, I was certainly miles away from any tea.

I paused and considered: Should I carefully retrace my steps? That always seems a poor-spirited way of getting home again, even though you are lost! On all sides stretched an expanse of hilly country, grey lichen-covered boulders, yellow-flowered gorse, wiry mauve and purple heather, and a wealth of green, and bronze, and golden tinted bracken, with occasional woods and larch plantations. There was a general hum of bees and insects in the air, and a pheasant rose from the ground close to me and flew with a *whirr* into a little coppice near by.

A sign-board was lying on the ground by the gate leading into the coppice. It was the worse for wind and weather, but one could still read the alarming warning, "Trespassers will be prose-

cuted!" Who would trespass, and who would prosecute, on that wild bit of moorland, I wonder? The only being in sight was a rabbit, sitting motionless close beside the prostrate notice and studying me silently with the air of a special constable! Yet even he went off and left me quite alone.

At that moment I caught sight of a chimney over the spur of the hill. I felt convinced it must be attached to a fireplace, and surely there would be a kettle on that fire. I made a bee-line for the place.

To the eye of the town-dweller, hill and moorland distances are apt to be deceptive; the house proved to be much farther off than I had at first imagined. But this gave added zest to expedition; I determined to reach it though I only arrived in time to put up there for the night. A nearer view showed the cottage to be the fag-end of a small hamlet lying snugly in the protecting hollow of the hills.

When I actually entered the village, there were so many pretty dwellings, and they all looked equally inviting, that I was undecided where to open an attack. However, I settled on one that had a couple of hollyhocks, some late pinks, and a black-currant bush growing out of the top of the garden wall, while a free-and-easy grape-vine, a tall monthly rose, and some clematis

waved arms of welcome to me from the front of the cottage.

Just as I approached the gate, a pleasant-faced woman came out of the door and walked down the garden path between the French marigolds that edged the flower-beds. She was the only sign of life in the place (apart from a few belated hens, who, being averse to early rising, I suppose, had determined to take time by the forelock, and were catching the historic early worm overnight).

I felt that the good lady's appearance was a distinct indication that Fate had decided I must have my tea there. Nevertheless, there were signs that she was bound on some important errand; instead of the ordinary sun-bonnet or battered hat that is the usual weekday headgear among our hills, she had donned a carefully-brushed though somewhat rusty black bonnet, and a black beaded mantle of unquestionable antiquity, both worn with the air of her Sunday best.

"Good evening," I began. "I'm sorry to trouble you, but I wonder if you can tell me where——"

"Th' chapel?" replied the woman before I could finish my sentence. "Why, of course you can't find 'un. But you jes' come 'long wi' me. I'm going there meself, an' though we'm a bit late, it don't matter; my man 'll be keeping a seat fur me, and ther'll be room, sure 'nough, for 'ee

to squeeze in too. I do al'ays tell 'un our chapel didn't oughter belong where 'tis. No place o' worship was ever more hid out o' road than ourn. Yet my man do say 'tis clear 'nough to see 'un if you'm comin' 'long the *lower* road; for there 'tis all to once. But as I say to him, the folk don't all a-come down 'long the lower road; an' if you come *up* 'long, why, there's no chapel to be seen, and then where'm you to? What I do say is, the way o' salvation oughter be so plain that th' wayfarin' man, though a *fool*, can't lose un. An' now here be you to prove me very words!"

The good soul was all this time trotting energetically along what I concluded could not be the lower road, since no chapel was in view. I just followed, wondering what would happen next! Meanwhile my companion talked, with scarcely comma-pause for breath.

"But I'm glad I happen to be late, or you might ha' been wanderin' around till you're all mizzy-mazed. Soon as I saw you comin' up 'long, I said to father—I was jes' settlin' 'im comfor'ble for th' night—'Father,' I said, 'here's a lady a-lookin' fur the chapel, sure 'nough. I shuden wonder a bit but what she's come to speak at th' meeting. Like as not she's a friend of the minister, an' 'pears she's lost.' I suppose you belong to London, ma'am?" This with a glance all over me to make sure there was no local hall-mark.

"My home is in London," I replied, "but just at present I'm staying at Woodacres."

"You've walked all the way from Woodacres?" she exclaimed.

"Yes; and I'm terribly hungry," I said, hurriedly seizing my chance.

At this the kind hospitable soul was most concerned, and insisted on our turning into a relative's house which we were passing at the moment. The door stood open, though the place seemed to be deserted.

"Myra," she called out. A girl came downstairs with some pocket-handkerchiefs in her hand which she appeared to be marking in red. There was a hurried whisper in a back room, and quickly she brought in a glass of milk and some bread and butter—for which I was truly thankful.

"The lady do look wisht," my companion explained to the girl. "She's walked from Woodacres to hear the minister from London. She lost her way, and so didn't get in time for the tea-meeting."

I was interested in this item of information about myself, but decided to let the unexpected situation develop as it pleased.

We were soon walking along the road again, my companion talking the whole time. Myra was her niece, going to Bristol next week to start in a draper's shop. "She says 'tisn't stylish

nowadays to let folks think as you does your washing yourself, so she's making sort o' red oughts and crosses in the corner, that the other girls 'll think as the washin' was put out. *Put out*, indeed!"—with utter scorn of voice—"'Isn't it all *put out?*' I asks her. How could they dry 'un else? I've no patience with such fangels—*that* I haven't! And isn't this war dreadful? I see in the paper I was a-readin' to father that that Kayser do call it a righteous war. *A righteous war*—when he don't even leave off a-fighting of a Sunday!"

Just then we turned a corner, and the maligned chapel certainly burst into view "all to once."

The first thing to attract attention, as we neared the modest building, was a large board above the front entrance, displaying the words "Revival Meetings" in bold white letters pasted on a red turkey twill background.

A hymn was progressing when we entered; a seat had been reserved for the cottager by her husband, and had been left in charge of his hat (turned upside down and holding a red pocket-handkerchief covered with large white spots), while he himself distributed hymn books with backs all suffering from spinal complaint in a more or less acute form.

By dint of energetic compression on the part

of the good-natured occupants of the pew, room was made for me as well as for my companion, the owner of the hat electing to stand in the aisle, as became a pillar of the church; the conspicuous crease adorning each trouser-leg and the back of his black coat proclaimed them his best clothes, and gave additional evidence that the meeting was of more than ordinary week-day importance.

The place was packed to its utmost capacity. I decided that I had never in my whole life heard a harmonium more asthmatically out of tune, and at the same time I wished that the lamps (which were economically turned down, daylight being still visible) could only be raised, since the odour of paraffin was not a refreshing ingredient to add to the air of the already close room. For on our hills, as in other places where fresh air is most abundant, ventilation is the least among the virtues practised by the natives.

The congregation took some slight adjustment before all managed to wedge themselves into the seats after the hymn. The general shuffle and scuffle having subsided, a man on the platform addressed the assembly.

"I am sorry to say our brother has not yet arrived."

The glow of expectancy on the faces of the people suddenly vanished.

"We think he has made a mistake over the

time of commencement; possibly he imagines it is seven instead of six o'clock; but he is certainly coming, or he would have telegraphed——"

The disappointed ones looked hopeful again.

"Two friends have driven off to meet him" —many heads craned round in the direction of the door, though the honoured pair were now a couple of miles away—"and they will doubtless bring him along as quickly as possible. I think we may safely rely on him being here in about half an hour." All eyes now scanned the face of the clock. "In the meanwhile, we will hold a short Testimony meeting; and perhaps Brother Wilson will first of all lead us in prayer."

The man with the hymn-books, standing in the aisle, responded. Without a moment's halt or hesitation he poured forth a torrent of mingled appeal, confession, praise and request. He touched on their week of services, on themselves as a church, on the village and (according to his view) its state of spiritual darkness; then he went further afield and dealt with the whole of England, the sailors on our warships, and the soldiers on the battlefields. This thought led him to mention the Colonies, the missionaries labouring in foreign lands; and then he prayed for the heathen who lived so far away that no missionary had yet reached them. He concluded with a plea for all backsliders and a pæan of gratitude for those who were saved.

The congregation followed the long prayer intently, punctuating every remark with "Amen," and many other expressions of assent, uttered devoutly though fervently.

Then the one who presided asked all who had received a blessing that week to testify to the others of the great things that had befallen them. He sat down. After a pause of but half a minute, a woman rose, saying in a quiet voice—

"I feel I ought to take the earliest opportunity of telling how good God has been to me. I came to these meetings as hopeless as any human being could very well be; but God has lifted the load from my soul; and now, although I cannot see any light ahead, He has shown me He is near, and I am content to walk by faith. And I know the light will come soon."

She sat down, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the voice of the chairman—

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

A decrepit old man next hobbled to his feet. His voice was feeble; but the peaceful look on his wrinkled face, and the light that shone in his eyes, carried wonderful conviction with them. He was somewhat diffuse, but dwelt on all the goodness that had fallen to his lot through life, and his eager anticipation of the call that should summon him Home.

When once the ice was broken, the people

followed one another as fast as they could. An elderly woman sitting next to me rose to her feet, steadying herself by holding on to the pew in front with her work-worn hands, for she was trembling. She spoke in a hesitating manner; yet what she said had infinite pathos in it. Would they remember in their prayers the lads who were fighting so far away, some out of reach of any services like these, that they might not forget the God of their father and mother, and that they might be brought back safely to the old home again.

And the poor woman, who was evidently much overwrought, just sat down and hid her face in her handkerchief. I couldn't help putting my hand over hers in sympathy.

There were many other bowed heads in the meeting by then—old, careworn women as well as younger ones, old men in plenty, but so few young fellows.

"Let us pray," said the chairman. All eyes were closed. There was a slight pause, and then another voice full of wonderful restfulness sent up a prayer to the Great Comforter on behalf of all the mothers and fathers present, who night and day were longing for their sons' return, and for the wives who with aching hearts were hungering for news of the absent loved ones. The prayer was very simple and unconventional, just the asking of a boon from a Friend. But

the speaker understood the heartbreaks that were in those suppressed sobs, and his words brought comfort to many a lonely one that night.

When he ceased, the lamps were all raised, and there on the rostrum was one of the greatest —if not *the* greatest—of the preachers of our times.

"The minister from London" had arrived.

I was amazed when I saw him there—a man who preached every Sunday to congregations numbering several thousands; whose name was the most powerful attraction that could be found for a May meeting poster or a Convention programme; a theologian whose lectures and writings were followed with the closest attention by hundreds of students.

As he stood up in that small village chapel, the first thought that came into my mind was something like this: What a waste to have such a big man at a small meeting like this when he could easily fill Albert Hall; and in any case he will probably be right above their heads; he is far too scholarly for these simple-minded uneducated people. He will be quite lost on them.

What I forgot was the fact that after all it is the Message that counts in such a case.

The famous preacher had a Message for humanity; and he was great enough to be able to deliver it in a way that would be understood

by anyone, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. And he was wise enough to know that he might be doing a big work in speaking to that handful of people in that remote corner of England, seeing that a chance visit had brought him into the vicinity; therefore, when they had asked him if he would speak at the revival meetings they were holding, he had consented at once; and I was not the only one who had reason to be grateful to God for the preacher's words that night; mine was not the only heavy heart that had come into the little chapel badly in need of an uplift; I was not the only one who felt almost alone in a losing cause, with all the old-time beliefs tottering.

He read from Revelation vii. in the Revised Version:

After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb . . .

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and

night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

There was a moment's silence as he closed his Bible. And then he began to talk to the little crowd before him—not about the war, but about much that the war is bringing, trouble sorrow, suffering, anxiety—great tribulation indeed.

I am not going to make any attempt to give you his sermon: merely to take isolated sentences from a man's address, and set them down in cold print, deprived of the added strength and meaning that voice and tone and emphasis and context convey, is usually most unsatisfactory.

But I wish you could have been there and seen the tense eager look on every face, as he took us quickly and concisely over the great crises that have befallen humanity in bygone ages, when it has seemed again and again as though Christianity has been dealt a staggering blow—and yet in every case the result has been the ultimate triumph of God, and the building up of His people.

He reminded us how the darkest day in the world's history, when our Lord's death

seemed to end all hope, all promise of His Kingdom, was in reality the day of the greatest victory.

But I cannot give even a summary of his address; I can only tell you of the effect it had upon me, and I think there were many others to whom Light came in a strangely vivid manner that evening.

It seemed as though I was suddenly taken right out of my own small petty troubles, and shown a bigger view of the world than I had ever seen in my widest imaginings before. Things that had been perplexing, bewildering before, seemed to fit in quite naturally into a huge plan that was making for the ultimate good of humanity. But more than all this, there suddenly came that enheartening sense of being no longer a unit, no longer one of a small company fighting against overwhelming odds; I was now one of a huge army that had been marching on through all time, an army that will still be adding and adding to its numbers, so long as the world shall last.

I seemed to hear the trampling of the feet, the great surge of the voices as they sang the old yet ever new anthem—

"Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour,

and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever."

Here was no room for doubt; no question as to ultimate results; no misgivings; no apprehensions. The final victory did not rest with me; but I was privileged to take part in it if I was willing to endure any hardships or tribulation that might happen by the way. And even these seemed so slight, not to be mentioned beside the joy of the great triumph that was surely ahead.

The Vision comes to us all differently, at different times, in a different manner; but assuredly I had a glimpse then of the things that are outside our everyday ken. I knew for an absolute certainty that I was one of the greatest army that can ever be mustered; I knew for an absolute certainty that God is leading this army, and that with Him there is no possibility of failure, and that finally He will permit evil to be banished and Good will prevail. I realised that any afflictions we are called upon to bear here are but for a moment. Nothing can hinder the progress of the great multitude that no man can number—Christ's followers through all the ages. In spite of all the tribulation—*because* of the tribulation—they reach His throne at last, and worship Him, while He wipes away the tears that may have gathered by the way.

My thoughts had journeyed far away from

the little chapel and its earnest worshippers. I was recalled by the preacher's voice reciting his closing sentence—

"And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round the throne . . . and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

We stood up to sing the concluding hymn—one that has for long been a great favourite of mine—

Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar;
From the wild and scorching desert,
  Afric's sons of colour deep;
Jesu's love has drawn and won them,
  At the cross they bow and weep.

Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar;
From the Indies and the Ganges
  Steady flows the living stream
To love's ocean, to His bosom,
  Calvary their wond'ring theme.

Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar;
From the Steppes of Russia dreary,
  From Slavonia's scatter'd lands,

They are yielding soul and spirit
Into Jesu's loving hands.

Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar;
From the frozen realms of midnight,
Over many a weary mile,
To exchange their soul's long winter
For the summer of His smile.

Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar:
All to meet in plains of glory,
All to sing His praises sweet:
What a chorus, what a meeting,
With the family complete!

And how that hymn was sung! It all seemed part of the music of the Great Army. No longer we thought primarily of the troops rallying to the call of the Mother Country and coming from the far ends of the world to fight in earthly warfare; our souls saw farther than this—a multitude out of every nation of all tribes and peoples and tongues, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, all marching under the banner of the Lord Jehovah.

I had received the answer to the questions I had been asking earlier in the day: "What had Christianity accomplished?" It had accomplished *this:* It had enlisted this mighty stream of humanity. We in that humble little chapel were merely a small handful, but we belonged to

that Great Army; we had only to march on, trusting and worshipping God.

Was it possible that I had been picturing myself one of a small force struggling for Right that was in danger of being overmastered by Might! Now, I saw ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, on ahead of me, and could even hear the tramp and the singing of the tens of thousands that would follow on after me.

Oh, it was wonderful to feel oneself in such a mighty company!

At the close, while I was exchanging greetings with the preacher, my friend who had brought me to the chapel busied herself in finding someone who would be driving home in my direction—the meeting had been attended by people from many miles round. She discovered that a farmer and his wife were driving within a quarter of a mile of my cottage, and I was placed in their trap, carefully wrapped up in a warm Paisley shawl that had been produced from somewhere, the night being described as "a bit freshish, after all the dryth we've had."

We didn't talk much on the homeward journey. My companions were thinking some deep thoughts, I was certain, from the few remarks they let drop. But we English do not easily betray our hearts in public. Hence the

farthest the farmer's wife got was the remark, "I'd dearly like to hear he again." To which her husband replied, "Ay! for sure."

They told me the meetings had been much blessed, but this one was the best of all. Oh, yes, quite different from the others. No, the usual congregation was not as large as this, only about forty; the village was small. But people had come from all over the hills this week; to-day twenty had walked in from Brownbrook —that was seven miles each way.

They went on without any connecting link to say they felt sure the English would win. There was no doubt in their minds about this, one could see; and then the reason was clear. "Our Tom's there," the woman explained to me, as though I of course knew "Our Tom," and his presence at the front settled the matter.

And I thought of the many fathers and mothers who were looking away across the Straits, with just that pride and faith because "Our Tom" is helping his country.

At last we came to the little lane that turned off from the turnpike-road, and led to my cottage, and I said good-bye to my companions. The small white dog with the brown ears had heard my footsteps and had run out joyfully to meet me; he had begun to be seriously concerned as to whether he would ever get a proper meal

again! The night was certainly a bit freshish, but a glorious moon was out, and the hills were all high lights and deep shadows. I stopped a moment at my own gate, to look down at the old grey Abbey lying in the valley seven hundred feet below. Everything was still and peaceful. Only an owl called to another one in the steep woods across the river, and a couple of baby owls answered. An apple fell with a dull thud whenever the wind drifted across the orchard. It was so quiet, so restful; it was difficult to think there was lurid war-fog away beyond those hills.

Then suddenly, as I watched, I saw in the distance a procession of swinging, twinkling lights moving along a footpath that cut through a wood and crossed a low spur of the hills.

For the moment I wondered what it was, but in an instant I knew; it was the party from Brownbrook on their homeward tramp, and their lanterns were lighting them down the rugged precipitous footpath that was lying in deep shadow.

When they reached the level road they started singing, their voices in beautiful harmony, rising up and echoing again and again against the steep hillsides.

Was I thinking of battlefields with a saddened heart again? No, the cloud had lifted from my soul; I could look for something

better, something more world-wide in its effects than even this terrible war. And as I stood thinking all this, the words came up to me that they were singing, as they tramped along the silent moonlit road, at the foot of the forest-clad hills:

"Coming, coming, yes, they are,
Coming, coming, from afar;
All to meet in plains of glory,
All to sing His praises sweet:
What a chorus, what a meeting,
With the family complete!"

X

The Little People of the Streams

HAVE you ever heard the Little People of the Streams singing in the night? I wonder!

Once you have heard their music you will never forget it!

The first time I heard it was one February—shortly after I had taken the cottage—the season above all others when the brooks and falls and mountain springs are over-full of water, that hurries along at a great pace, tumbling over rocks, dropping down into green wells and grottos below, always galloping down hill till finally it reaches the ever-rushing river in the valley.

By day, each brook seems merely to be chatting sociably to the banks and the long harts-tongue ferns as it passes down, and you only hear one at a time. But after dark, when most other sounds have ceased, the voices of the streams seem to grow marvellously in volume.

I was lying awake one night with the windows open, listening literally to the sound of many waters, and trying to disentangle them.

First I heard the spring outside my garden gate as it scrambled down from the hillside above,

splashing the overhanging greenery with light spray, and finally pouring out of a little trough —dark brown wood, closely enamelled with green mosses—into a rocky pool, where it ceases its swirl for half a minute, just while it gets its breath, before rushing on down the hill, finding its own way around, or over, all sorts of obstacles, and resenting any interference of man.

Soon I could distinguish a second brook, that serves a cottage a quarter of a mile further along the lane, before it winds about and enters my lower orchard. This had overflowed in the orchard, and was having quite a gay time, running skittishly out of the orchard gate and into another lane, instead of pursuing its proper course.

Next I was able to detach the conversation of the small waterfall that drops about a hundred feet from an overhanging ledge of rock into a green cave under the hill, where mosses of wonderful size abound, and yellow flags stand guard at the entrance, with creeping jenny and forget-me-nots just outside.

The sound always seems to increase as you listen, and soon I detected the noise of the river as it tears over successive weirs. If the tide is low it is often a roar when you stand on the river bank beside a weir; but up here on the heights the noise is softened to a purling sound, that runs like a never-ceasing ground-bass or pedal note

amid the fluctuating tones of the nearer streams.

Other and more distant murmurings floated in at the window; but one could never allocate them all, for, excepting in the hottest weather, this is in truth "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills."

I was thinking of this, when suddenly the babbling of the water was drowned in the sound of wonderful bells that rose upon the night air. It was not from our village church; that possesses only one bell, whose sound, unfortunately, resembles nothing so much as a cracked iron shovel struck with a pair of tongs: and there is no other bell for miles around.

And yet there was no mistaking it. I could distinctly hear the joyous clashing and clanging of bells in a tall steeple.

It was no brazen banging; rather, some fairy music, like the carillon at Malines (which I am proud to remember I once played, though, alas! I shall never play it again).

I listened in amazement; soon was added the sound of voices, like subdued distant singing in some vast cathedral, while the bells still clashed outside. Yet it was never close at hand; it always seemed to float to me from a distance.

I was sure I was not asleep, for I knew where I was, and decided to get up and go to the

window, when—the dog barked—(probably he could hear a fox prowling around outside). Instantly the spell was broken. I opened my eyes; there was no sound but the murmuring and burbling of the brooks.

Like a sensible person, I of course decided that I had been dreaming.

Yet again and again have I heard the clanging bells, with often the sound of an organ and singing wafted through the open window. It always comes when the streams are most impetuous and when I am in that lotus-flowering land that lies between awakeness and sleep.

The music is always enthrallingly happy, and my only regret is that the bells and the singers do not come a trifle nearer, so that I could catch every note and jot it all down for future reference.

I related my experiences to one or two people; but this was all the information they seemed able to give me:

"If I were you, I should run down to Margate for a week or so, and leave all work behind. Go to a nice bright boarding-house, where there are lots of people, and enjoy yourself; and forget about that wretched cottage. You've been overdoing it lately. I had another friend just like you—got a little peculiar, you know, and then—well, I won't tell you any more; don't want to make you nervous, of course, but—her mother

never got over it, and *so* well-connected, too—kept three motors. You take my advice. I'll send you the name of a charming boarding-house, I know," etc.

Then I kept my own counsel, and decided that there were Little People living in the streams, just as I had always liked to picture them living in the flowers and under the mushrooms. And the music I heard was the Little People singing, and ringing all the harebells and foxglove bells that grow along the banks of the brooks.

I concluded that no one had ever heard them but myself. But, to my surprise, one day I found that others did know about these Little People!

I was reading "The Forest," by Stewart E. White, where he describes his impressions and experiences as he lay awake at night in a tent on the banks of a Canadian river, when I came upon the following, that in many points coincides with my own sensations :—

"In such circumstances you will hear what the boatmen call the voices of the rapids. Many people never hear them at all. They speak very soft and low, and distinct, beneath the steady roar and dashing, beneath even the lesser tinklings and gurglings whose quality superimposes them over the louder sounds. In the stillness of your hazy half-consciousness they speak; when you bend your attention to listen, they are gone, and only the tumults and the tinklings remain.

"But in the moments of their audibility they are very distinct. Just as often an odour will awake all a vanished memory, so these voices, by the force of a large impressionism, suggest whole scenes. Far off are the cling-clang-cling of chimes and the swell-and-fall murmur of a multitude *en fête*, so that subtly you feel the gray old town, with its walls, the crowded market-place, the decent peasant crowd, the booths, the mellow church building with its bells, the warm, dust-moted sun. Or, in the pauses between the swish-dash-dashings of the waters, sound faint and clear voices singing intermittently, calls, distant notes of laughter, as though many canoes were working against the current; only the flotilla never gets any nearer, nor the voices louder. Th boatmen call these mist people the Huntsmen, and look frightened....Curiously enough, by all reports, they sugges always peacefulness—a harvest field, a street fair, a Sunday morning in a cathedral town, careless travellers—never the turmoils and struggles. Perhaps this is the great Mother's compensation in a harsh mode of life.

"Nothing is more fantastically unreal to tell about nothing more concretely real to experience, than this under-note of the quick water. And when you do lie awake a night, it is always making its unobtrusive appeal. Gradually its hypnotic spell works. The distant chimes ring louder and nearer as you cross the borderland of sleep. And then outside the tent some little woods noise snaps the thread. An owl hoots, a whippoorwill cries, a twig cracks beneath the cautious prowl of some night creature—at once the yellow sunlit French windows puff away—you are staring at the blurred image of the moon spraying through the texture of your tent."

Since reading this, I have spoken of the matter to others with more courage; and although the majority do not seem to have

come across them, I have discovered several people who have heard the Little People singing.

Some, indeed, have been kind enough to attempt to give me a lucid explanation of what they are pleased to call a very simple natural phenomenon, and they prattle of enharmonics and sound vibrations, of nodes and super-tones, in a very impressive manner. One tells me the whole thing is merely a psychological emotion vibrating in sympathy with the acoustical environment.

I dare say.

Personally, I would just as soon leave it unelucidated. There are certain moods in which I do not want such things as nature, and love, and beauty, and self-sacrifice explained. It is enough for me that they are, and that I have been permitted to enjoy them.

And although I know that the Little People are not necessarily wearing gauze wings and white frocks and stars in their hair, as I pictured them in my first childhood, I still like to think that even in the brooks something is singing, something rejoicing, something giving thanks for the gift of life.

XI

The Funeral of the Hero

It was three months after the funeral of the Village Hero. Now I come to think of it, I haven't mentioned the funeral before.

The hero, a porter at the little railway station, enlisted very early in the campaign. Our village —in the main—did nobly in the way of early enlistment.

A quiet, retiring young fellow, he had never singled himself out for any sort of notoriety, though I, personally, had always remarked on his unvarying courtesy and his willingness to do everything he could to assist passengers.

The news of his death was the first thing to bring the War actually home to our isolated corner of the world.

People had known he was ill, because his wife had been summoned to a military hospital some weeks before, when his condition was pronounced critical. But no one had really anticipated the worst—till it came. And then the word passed quickly from cottage to cottage: "Poor Aleck's gone!"

"Ay! You don't say so! Ain't it just like they Huns to go and kill off the best of the

bunch," said one woman who never had a good word for the lad during his lifetime.

One and all agreed forthwith that proper respect must be shown to "the remains"; and those who didn't intend to inconvenience themselves by fighting, felt they were serving their country nobly by seeing that poor Aleck had a handsome funeral.

The news of his death reached the village on Friday. On Saturday the older members of the family selected the spot for his grave in the little churchyard, as, of course, he must be buried near his home.

By Sunday all the relatives to the remotest generation wore deep mourning to church—thanks to the superhuman efforts of the village dressmaker, and numerous ready-mades purchased in the nearest town.

The Rector was in a nursing-home in London at the time, but the curate, though only newly arrived, preached a moving sermon, extolling the courage of the young man who had died "with his face to the foe, braving the falling shells and raining bullets in order to defend his country."

The sentiment was right—Aleck was willing to do all that; but in reality he never got beyond a training camp on the east coast, where, the air proving too bleak for him after the mildness of the west, he had gone down with pneumonia.

The new curate didn't know that, however, and everybody said it was a beautiful sermon, and went and told the poor mother about it, as she had been too grief-stricken to go to church.

So far the widow had not written herself; but that wasn't surprising; she would be too broken down with trouble. Willing heads and hands did all they could, however, to anticipate her wishes.

They telegraphed to the former curate (now the vicar of a crowded Lancashire parish) and asked if he would conduct the funeral; he had known the deceased from boyhood. He wired back: "Yes; send day and hour."

They sent to uncles and aunts and cousins throughout Great Britain: all who could arrived post haste on Monday. And what a gathering it was of outstanding members of the clan! Those who hadn't recognised each other's existence for years now forgot their ancient feuds, while one and all discovered such good qualities in the poor lad, and were so anxious to insist on the nearness of their relationship, that his death did not seem altogether in vain.

I myself wrote a note to the widow, only waiting to post it till I could get her address.

Miss Bretherton, the Rector's niece, hurried home from London to do what she could to comfort the parents, who were aloof from the

general excitement and knew only the sorrow of the occasion.

While waiting for further details to arrive, people made wreaths, and discussed how best the engine could be draped in black.

As there was no letter by Tuesday morning, and the vicar in Lancashire had again asked for particulars, the self-constituted committee of management decided to send a wire to the widow. After composing—and then discarding—twenty-six different messages, till the post-office was threatened with a famine in telegram forms, the post-mistress came to their assistance, and suggested that the wording should be as brief and as straightforward as possible, to save misunderstanding—and expense. Eventually they were all persuaded to agree to the following:

"What train will the coffin come by? Reply paid."

In about an hour the widow answered:

"Whose coffin? Don't know what you mean. Aleck nearly well."

The whole village has had three points under discussion ever since.

I. Who was it said he *was* dead?

II. Can a man be made to pay for his own grave being dug when he refuses to occupy it?

III. And what is to become of the mourning anyhow?

XII

Just a Little Piece of Griskin

I WAS reminded of the funeral when I arrived at the valley station one spring morning, by the fact that it was "the remains" who opened the carriage door for me and helped us out with our things.

He was home for a few days' leave, looking very smart and upright in his uniform; and he saluted (even though he permitted himself to smile) when I gave him a half-crown, telling him to buy himself a wreath.

The white-painted garden gate had been placed wide open by way of welcome. We had left behind us, in town, weather that called itself the end of March, but in reality ought to have been January; we arrived at the little cottage to find that the calendar had taken a leap forward, for here it was like the end of April. On the grey stone walls beside the gate clumps of wallflowers were in bloom—masses of pale primrose flowers mixed with those of a rich rose-purple variety; only these two sorts had been planted in the chinks of this particular wall. I am sure the dear things nodded at us as we entered.

All over the garden were more wallflowers bursting by the thousand into bloom. Some beds were a mixture of clear bright yellow flowers, combined with the sort that are a deep mahogany, looking as though they were made of velvet; other beds had a pretty rose-pink variety; while on the top of more walls, and in corners and patches about the garden, were the old-fashioned "streaky" kinds, all aglow with brown and yellow.

The long bed in front of the porch, given over to cowslips, oxlips, polyanthus, auriculas, and suchlike homely flowers, was very gay. The polyanthus were a delightful medley of claret colour, pink, brown, crimson, orange, yellow, most of them looking as though the edges of the petals had been buttonholed around with silk of a contrasting colour. It seemed as though the flowers in this bed fairly tip-toed as we came along the path, and stretched their necks as high as ever they could, from out of their crinkled leaves, to show how remarkably fine they were.

In the narrow beds under the cottage windows double daffodils made plenty of colour, and at the edge were clumps of primroses—various shades of pink and crimson. These had seeded over into the path, with the result that baby primrose-plants were coming up cheerily between the rough flagstones. The ordinary

yellow primrose was starring the grass all about the orchard, where wild daffodils were swaying by the hundred. The white flowers of the blackthorn were like snowdrifts on the hedges.

It was so wonderful, after the bleak, cheerless aspect of town, to come upon this world of smiling growing things. The soft air, sweeping over the hills, brought the scent of ploughed fields and newly-turned earth, of bursting buds and opening blossoms, with the ozone of the sea, and the salt of the weed that lies on the rocks around the lighthouse in the far-away distance.

There seemed to be an all-pervading peace that laid hold of one's very soul; and yet you could not say it was really quiet, for birds were giving rival concerts in every tree, and quite a number were devoting their energies to saying insulting things to the newcomers and the small dog who had taken the liberty of encroaching on their ancient heritage. They are not sufficiently grateful for the fact that I leave my woods uncut, and undisturbed, as bird sanctuaries.

Lambs were bleating in the valley meadows; the spring gurgled cheerfully outside the gate as it tumbled out of the spout into the pool below.

We stood in the garden for a moment to take a good breath, and drink in as much of the beauty as we could, when Virginia just touched my arm and looked towards a long belt of trees —mostly oak and fir—that runs down one side

of the garden and orchards, linking the larch woods up above us with the birch and hazel coppice down below—the coppice where the nightingales sing, and the tiny wrens and the tomtits build, and where the little dormouse lives, who comes out from among the undergrowth, with no apparent fear, when I stand in the wood-path and softly whistle.

This barricade of trees was originally left standing when the rest of the ground was cleared, to screen the house from the winter gales. But we have named it the Squirrels' Highway.

Sure enough, as we stood there silent and motionless, down came one little bushy tail from the upper woods, followed by another, probably his wife. They leapt from branch to branch, and from tree to tree, nibbling a young oak shoot here, sniffing delicately at a few leaves somewhere else.

Little bright eyes looked down and saw the strangers; but they had seen them before, and no harm ever resulted—only lovely feasts of nuts laid out on the tops of walls—so they just ran on down their own highway, seeming as light as feathers, and leaping and springing with indescribable grace.

At last they got to the high wall that divides the lower orchard from the birch and hazel coppice, and they played along that wall, bright spots of reddy-brown against the dark green of

the ivy and the purple tone of the swelling birch buds. All seemed gaiety and happiness, till a third little bushy tail popped up over the wall from the coppice—and then there were fireworks indeed! I expect they were relations who were not on cordial terms! We left them having a whole-hearted hand-to-hand fight—which, I must say, seems a much more satisfactory way of settling a difference than either Zepp or submarine methods.

Indoors the table had been laid for tea, preparatory to our arrival, by Mrs. Widow, who, as already mentioned, is the custodian of the house in my absence. She gives an old-world curtsy that is very disarming, and says, "I'm main glad to see you back again, miss, and I hope you'll find everything to your liking."

That, however, is as it may be.

Nevertheless, there is something about the way that table is always laid that rejoices my heart, even though I might not wish to have my meals set in that pattern every day. The large white cloth may not present the glass-like surface of the town-laundered tablecloth, but at least it is white, and—like the cottage sheets and towels and pillow-cases—it holds the scents of the hillside garden where it was hung out to dry; and though the creases are somewhat ridgy and insistent, and the cloth has been ironed a trifle

askew, I know several people who would rather have tea off this tablecloth than the most elaborate dinner and the finest napery that London hotels can produce.

Knives and forks are placed with great precision around the table at intervals, a cup and saucer and plate beside each, the crockery never by any chance matching! In the mathematical centre a loaf of farmhouse bread stands on a kitchen plate, flanked on one side—to the East, as it were—by a large white jug holding a quart of milk, and to the West, by the sugar basin. The big brown teapot stands at the South Pole; and a pudding-basin of new-laid eggs, laid by the widow's own fowls, are waiting, at the North Pole, to be cooked. A small plate bearing a dinner knife and half a pound of butter (which is never put into the proper butter dish) is placed at the South-West; this is balanced at the South-East by a pot of home-made jam and a tablespoon. Watercress and lettuce may grace the table, though this will be according to the season; but summer or winter, one feature is never omitted, and that is a large kitchen jug full of flowers, gathered by Mrs. Widow from her own garden.

On the day I am writing about, the jug had a brave handful of daffodils, a few sprays of red ribis, dark-brown wallflowers, some small ivy, with some short-stemmed polyanthus suffocating

in the centre of the big bunch. And it is wonderful how much you can get crammed into one jug when you try!

Abigail, having none of my weak-minded leanings towards "the primitive," scornfully whisked the whole lot off the table, as soon as Mrs. Widow had gone back to her own cottage, and re-laid it on modern lines.

We did not hurry over the meal. Virginia got on a lengthy dissertation as to the crying need for fish forks with magnetised prongs that would just draw the bones out of the fish, without any preliminary search and scrutiny. I suggested a radium tip to the prongs—I could think of nothing that seemed more suitable—but she said *that* might demolish fish and all, in which case one would get no more personal satisfaction out of the creature than one does when having to eat it with its full complement of bones intact.

I then ventured a suggestion that forks made like an ordinary magnet would do, if the fish were given steel drops in regular doses for a few weeks before being caught, so as to get its bones susceptible to the magnet. But Virginia was very lofty, as she always is, about my scientific explanations. I never heard her solution of the problem, because the telegram boy arrived at the moment, with a wire for Abigail, saying that her

mother had broken her arm (a genuine case this time !).

So she left by the next train, bewailing the fact that her mother could not get compensation from anyone, as she had given up a post of housekeeper but three months before; if she had only been in the situation still she could have claimed £300 a year for life, Abigail thought—provided the arm could only be induced to remain broken.

Some people, especially her relatives, were always unfortunate, she said, while others were just the reverse. There was a cousin of a friend of hers; he had been out of work for a year or so before he got a job, and then the very first day he met with an accident at the works and had to have his leg amputated; and there he is now, a gentleman for life, comfortably settled on his compensation. Her people never had luck like that. It did seem hard !

"Are you awake ?" Virginia's voice lilted up the stairs next morning.

Awake ! why, sleep had been impossible in that cottage for hours past !

For sheer undiluted racket, commend me to two earnest-souled girls, who get up early, and go about with a stealthy tread that creaks every old board in the place, and commune with each other in stage whispers that penetrate through

every crack in the floor, all on the pretext of making the fire !

We had decided that we could manage very well ourselves, without sending for anyone to take Abigail's place; and in order to forestall me, the others had got up about cockcrow, and then began such a whirligig below, that I just lay still and endeavoured to allocate every fresh noise.

They raked and shovelled at the grate, and appeared to be scattering cinders all over the place. They broke up applewood twigs with resounding snaps, and argued as to the amount required to set the fire going. Ursula said you ought to put in handfuls till you got a good crackling blaze; Virginia said that was a childish, brainless way of doing it, to say nothing of the chance of waste; by rights the quantity of twigs employed ought to be strictly in inverse ratio to the quantity of inflammable gas contained in the coal. I dare say I should have heard a good deal more as to the way to assess the ignitable quality of coal, but fortunately the fire burnt up quickly, and they gave their attention to other domestic details.

They dashed about the brass fender; they whacked the blacklead brush against the oven-door at every turn; they set down the zinc pail with a ringing thud, and then scoured the hearth with zeal enough to take off half an inch of stone

surface; they polished the brass fire-irons with some concoction of bath-brick and salt which they invented on the spot, as they couldn't find any metal polish; they banged the hearthrug out of doors till the surrounding hills reverberated with the echoes; they rinked the carpet-sweeper up and down till it made me dizzy to listen; and as this was not thorough enough for Ursula, she also got a short stiff brush and apparently pommelled out any dust that might be under the settle and in other obscure corners; they dusted with equal energy, and then went off into the kitchen to consult about the breakfast menu, while the kettle chose the opportunity to boil all over the fire, thereby raising clouds of white ash that settled on everything, and they said, "Oh, dear! Just *look* at it."

Finally, I heard the white cloth being flapped over the table; cups and saucers and plates were chinked and rattled off the dresser; knives and forks and spoons jingled on to the table, and I knew that breakfast was well under way. It was just then that Virginia put her head through the staircase-door to ask—in moderated tones calculated not to disturb me should I still be slumbering!—was I awake?

Hastily hopping out on to the rug, I replied that I was "nearly dressed, and would be down in a minute."

"No hurry," she replied artlessly, "we've only just come down ourselves, and are going to see to breakfast. But what I want to know is: Where do you keep your frying-pan?"

"Hanging on its proper nail in the kitchen," I replied.

"Well, it isn't there . . . No, it isn't on the saucepan shelf, either—we've hunted *everywhere*. . . . But Abigail didn't use it yesterday—don't you remember? We had boiled eggs, and some of that cold ham we brought with us. . . . All right, we can just as well have eggs again. . . That's true, we shan't want bacon, with that pork coming for dinner; but be quick, as the kettle's boiling now. . . Oh, it's not a bit of trouble."

Whether it was due to the sunshine, or to the tonic of the air, or to the virtuous feeling that always overtakes those who get up early in the morning and disturb everyone else, I cannot say; but at any rate Ursula announced that she intended to start right in, immediately after breakfast, and give the whole cottage a thorough spring cleaning.

The domesticities of the morning seemed to have whetted her appetite for such matters, and she said she felt she must give the place a "Dutch" turn-out, and have every shelf and stool and all the pots and pans scrubbed and

scoured and tilted out of doors to dry, as they do in Holland.

Virginia said that she, too, felt a strong force —it might be her sub-conscious self, or she might have a dual personality, she couldn't say which— within her, impelling her to turn the house inside out.

So I told them to go ahead; I'm the last one to discourage anyone from doing my work for me. I suggested, however, that for the first day they should confine their attentions to the living-rooms downstairs.

Of course, the reader of average intellect will wonder what necessity there could be for any such upheaval, seeing that the place would obviously have been overhauled before we arrived; but this brings me back to Mrs. Widow. "A worthy body and an honest soul," the Rector said, when he originally recommended her to me, all of which was quite true; but, alas, thoroughness in regard to house-cleaning is not her strong point.

When I first sought her out and broached the subject of the caretaker I was requiring, she listened in a non-committal way. I stated how much a year I was willing to pay—naming an exceptionally good sum—and explained that for this money the house must be looked after in my absence, and be got quite ready for me whenever I should come down, while anything she might

do while I was "in residence" would be paid for as an extra.

She showed no indecorous haste to secure the appointment. She merely said she would talk it over with her married daughter, and if she thought any more of it she would let me know. A few hours later she came to me, and said casually that on second thoughts she didn't mind obliging me. (No one ever "works" for you in our village, they merely "oblige.") In the interval, however, the whole village had gone into committee on the subject, and everyone's advice had been sought, and very freely given.

Once more I went through the terms of the agreement, and she said she quite understood. Nevertheless, subsequent events led me to believe that she regarded the annual wage in the light of a retaining fee only, since most of the work is always left to be done after I arrive, when it will have to be paid for as a separate transaction if it is more than Abigail can wrestle with.

At the same time I can truly endorse the Rector's tribute to her honesty. If I were to strew the floor with sovereigns or diamond rings, I know I should find them on the mantelpiece when next I returned, and she never annexes anything permanently.

But the fact that one has a village-wide reputation for honesty need not detract from

one's worldly prosperity—so long as one can borrow with light-hearted frequency, and borrow for indefinite periods, too! Mrs. Widow has reduced borrowing to a fine art, but her honesty is demonstrated by the fact that I have never known her decline to return any of my possessions; indeed, so scrupulous is she that she will bring back the tin of metal polish, when it is empty, explaining that she was quite sure I wanted it to be used rather than wasted!

Abigail invariably spends the first couple of days at the cottage in skirmishing and reclaiming missing articles. Knowing all this, I was not surprised when I heard the frying-pan was minus; I also knew that time would reveal other vacancies.

Had it been July or August, the preserving-pan—a family treasure—would have been gone, too. Mrs. Widow is always very solicitous for its welfare about fruit-gathering time; she says damp would easily hurt a really good preserving-pan, so she takes it home with her to keep it dry. Yet the poor thing will be left to face the winter in my kitchen with never a thought bestowed on its delicate constitution.

And it is just at jam-making time, too, that my kitchen scales and weights require the ameliorated atmosphere of Mrs. Widow's cottage; my own kitchen, with the midsummer sun upon it all day, being obviously far too cold and damp

for such highly-strung *bric-à-brac* as one pound and half-pound weights.

A town acquaintance once said to Virginia: "I suppose Miss Klickmann goes down to her cottage for poetic and literary inspiration?"

"Oh, dear, no!" was the reply. "She simply goes down, as a mere matter of feminine curiosity, to see what is left."

"Where do you keep your tea-towels?" Ursula began, as she prepared to wash up the breakfast things.

"There ought to be a pile in one of the drawers of the kitchen table," I said. "They are not there? Oh, well, they'll come back presently!"

While we were speaking, a small girl appeared at the side door, holding in one hand a basket containing a nice chunk of pork (wrapped in one of my tea-towels), and in the other hand my mincing-machine. This was Mrs. Widow's grandchild.

"If you please, ma'am, father's killed the pig, and mother thought you might like just a little piece of griskin, and mother's been taking care of the mincer so's it shan't get rusty."

An exchange of courtesies having been effected by means of a bottle of pear-drops, the small maid departed with her empty basket; the mincer was restored to its proper niche in the

pantry, and we were at least one tea-towel to the good.

I might mention that Mrs. Widow's married daughter had recently acquired considerable local fame by making "faggots," which were in great demand. You know the dish?—a combination of liver, pork, sage and onions, etc., baked in squares. Other people in the district made faggots, too, but none could rival hers, and orders came to her from many of the big houses.

"No one ever manages to get them chopped so beautifully fine as she does," said Miss Bretherton when recommending them to my notice. "I advise you to try them."

Still, whatever obligation there may have been was offset, surely, by the piece of pork. The griskin is the lean portion of some part of the quadruped's anatomy after the fat has been cut off for curing. This joint—which we never see in London—is always popular with us in the country; so popular, that I had ordered a piece only the day before from the butcher. It was just the season when people were killing their pigs, and the butcher had suggested griskin. Still, it was easy to put the extra piece in salt, and the flavour would only be improved thereby; my one regret was that the butcher had sent a very large joint, when I had particularly mentioned that I only wanted a little piece.

I had originally intended to devote the day to gardening, not to house-cleaning.

"Of course you keep a permanent gardener?" people inquire of me. "I see; a general handy man; it comes to the same thing; he will save you all trouble."

Those of my acquaintances who have never had a place out of town to look after, always conclude that country districts fairly bristle with capable, willing men, and poor-but-honest, hard-working women, all of them anxious to do my work — and at a merely nominal wage too; whereas one has the utmost trouble to get either man or woman to do a day's work at any price. I pay the handy man the same wage per day as I pay my thoroughly experienced London gardener; and he can only manage to spare me a small amount of his time at that price.

He knows very little about flowers, but he weeds in an enlightened manner, and he understands the elementary principles underlying vegetable growing on a small scale. For the most part the villagers bother very little about their gardens, only cultivating just sufficient ground for their immediate needs.

The unenlightened local method of dealing with weeds is this. He-who-is-paid-to-garden leaves them to grow to a fair height—especially if no one is likely to be there for some weeks to see them. Then, when they have absorbed a

generous amount of nourishment from the ground, and generally suffocated everything small within their reach, he merely turns the soil over, with the weeds on the underneath side, draws a rake over the surface, and presto! you have a nice tidy bed.

This method is known as "digging in."

Of course, in twenty-four hours the good-natured things start to poke cheerful noses through the soil again. But that doesn't matter. Life is long, and the gardener is paid to clear them away again.

There is an optional method, referred to as "cleaning up the beds." In that case, he leaves the weeds to grow higher, more especially in beds that are full of promising seedlings; in fact, he doesn't worry about them at all until there is sudden and urgent reason why the garden should present a kempt, well-cared-for appearance.

Then, the weeds being so healthy and luxuriant that they would raise the face of creation a couple of inches if he attempted to dig them in, he simplifies matters by removing the surface of the earth, weeds and seedlings and all; this he wheels away in a barrow, perchance to lay it down on some rough and rubbly bit of lane that the road-menders have ignored.

When she-who-pays arrives, all expectation, and inquires for the missing seedlings, the tiller of the soil shakes his head lugubriously, and

refers to the recent plague of slugs (or thunderstorms, or frost, or east winds, or whatever other natural phenomena seem most convincing), and says he had a hard job to save what is left in the garden—this last in a martyr-like tone of voice, indicating that though all his self-sacrificing labour is passed over unrecognised, he himself has the virtuous consciousness of having at least done his simple duty, and what man can do more!

Now I come to think of it, there are many different ways of gardening; that must be why it is always interesting to go round the garden with the gardener. When I say different ways, I don't mean such trifling divergencies of method as landscape gardens versus intensive culture, or tomatoes under glass versus gloxinias. These primarily concern the pocket; the differences that interest me are temperamental.

There is Miss Bretherton, for instance, a most diligent and vigilant gardener. And yet she never seems to me to get much genuine, unalloyed pleasure out of her garden; she never basks in its beauty—though for the matter of that Miss Bretherton never basks anywhere! A middle-aged woman who does her duty by a scattered parish, conscientiously and thoroughly and unremittingly, never has time for that sort of dissipation! Miss Bretherton deals with her garden much as she deals with the parish. At best it is a case of striving to lead reluctant feet

in the paths of virtue, while by far the greater part of her efforts is an unflagging wrestle with original sin.

A walk round the rectory garden is usually like this. Miss Bretherton always picks up a pair of gardening scissors and a basket mechanically as she steps out.

"What a wonderful glow of colour!" I exclaim, as I bury my nose in a magnificent Gloire de Dijon.

"But it is such a wretched thing for sending up suckers," Miss Bretherton replies. "I'm always digging them up. Why, I declare there is one a foot high," giving it a drastic prod with the scissors. "I thought I'd cut them all away yesterday"; more prods till the sucker is finally unearthed.

"And aren't those hollyhocks tall!"

"Not nearly so fine as they would have been if that red-spotty blight hadn't attacked them. Just look at these leaves!"

Snip, snip, snip! Off came a dozen or so.

I stop to admire the fairy flowers in the Virginia stock, rosy carmine, lemon and mauve, just opening in the sun.

"I don't think there is anything sweeter for a border," I remark.

The trouble with Virginia stock is that it so soon looks untidy," Miss Bretherton says dispiritedly. "Do what I will, I can't keep the

edges tidy once that goes off bloom. I pull it all out at last, and then that leaves a bare rough-dried looking space with nothing in it."

I praise the white lilies—such a stately row of spotless beauty.

"I wish I could do something to hide that raggedness at the bottom of the stems. They do look so shabby. Excuse me, I see that Canterbury bell has withered off—that's the worst of them. They all go at once so suddenly, and look such a withered mass. I must cut off those dead blooms, it may send up a second crop. But there, if it does, they will only be small bells!"

I'm not sure whether the handy man's method is temperamental, but I know it is very conversational, if you can call it a conversation when he insists on doing the whole of it himself. He is an elderly bachelor; and Mrs. Widow once explained the situation to me:

"You see, he ain't never had no wife to talk his head off for him, so he talks it off for hisself."

I give him copious instructions whenever I leave, which he promises to carry out; but no matter what I may have asked him to do—whether it was to nail up the yellow roses over the front door, or to set lavender cuttings—it all works out to the same thing in the end: it is only the vegetables that are deemed worthy of mention. The flowers are just tolerated

because—well, because I keep on putting them in the ground, and you can't expect practical common-sense from a woman anyhow! But after all, it isn't reasonable to expect an untrained cottager to make a garden different from those he sees around.

You can understand, however, that we are usually kept pretty busy from the moment we arrive till the hour we go away.

But this particular morning gardening was out of the question. The two girls started with the spring-cleaning on most vigorous lines. Virginia said the hygienic way was to place everything that was movable out-of-doors, so that, scientifically speaking, the sun's rays could penetrate every fibre and tissue, and neutralise the harmful germs that would assuredly be lurking by the million in every stick and shred in a house as neglected as that one had been.

I objected to my cherished possessions being referred to as sticks and shreds, and I said so, with emphasis.

Ursula said if we were going to argue at that length it would be the August Bank Holiday before we got things back in their place again. For her part, she regarded all that germ-business as a harmless fairy-tale that was very suitable and safe reading for a mild intellect like Virginia's All the same, she quite agreed that everything ought to be put outside, so as to give more

elbow-room indoors; moreover, things that were washed and scrubbed would, of course, dry quicker in the sun.

So out they all came!

Then we saw how badly the boards around the carpet needed re-staining, and we dispatched Virginia to the village to see what she could get in the way of oak or walnut floor-stain.

She returned with a large bottle of rheumatic lotion. Miss Jarvis, who keeps the village shop, hadn't a bottle of stain left, but Virginia turned over everything she had and decided on the lotion, as it was thickish and a nice rich brown. She bore it off, Miss Jarvis beseeching her to remember it was for outward application only.

It wasn't bad, only it flavoured the air rather strongly for days.

Ursula's labours were bearing much fruit. To look at the scene outside the cottage, you might have thought a distraint had been made on the contents for rent. Chairs, tables, meat-safes, crockery, saucepans, oak chests, pictures, books, the warming-pan, brass candlesticks, coal-scuttles, fenders, were all basking unblushingly, and in the direst confusion, in the sunshine.

What pained me most was to notice how the furniture that had looked delightfully appropriate in the subdued lights of indoors, became appallingly shabby when subjected to the glare of

day. I remarked that if I had confronted the things on a London burglar's barrow, I should neither have recognised them nor have desired to claim them.

Ursula tried to reassure me by reminding me that the things were mostly very old, and antique things are invariably shabby as well as very valuable. Virginia contributed the consoling information that she had noticed, whenever people moved, they always left their good furniture behind in the empty house, for they only removed shabby-looking things.

I tried to feel duly proud of my possessions once more; but all the same I suggested that we should hurry on as fast as we could; I had a strong conviction that if any of my county neighbours called, they would probably be more impressed with the disreputable appearance of my belongings than with their priceless antiquity.

Of course, people came while we were still in chaos, as I knew they would. The first to arrive was Miss Primkins, who apologised for calling at such an hour, but she wanted to consult me on a private matter, she was so very worried. Was I busy? (with an inquiring glance at the all-pervading marine-store). Naturally I said I wasn't.

The difficulty was to find a seat indoors to accommodate us while we talked; it wasn't

warm enough, as yet, to sit in the open. I found two chairs in the china pantry—a fair-sized apartment with a big window, even though it is called a pantry — and here we established ourselves, Miss Primkins reiterating how kind she thought it of me to receive her in this homely way, treating her just like one of the family. I tried to make her understand, however, that, as a general rule, it was not the family custom to foregather in the crockery cupboard!

She was a long while getting to the cause of her worry. I wonder why it is that so many women, when they start out to say anything, wander about and deviate into innumerable side channels and backwaters before they get to the point?—but there, I do myself, so we won't follow up that line of thought.

Eventually, it transpired that when war was declared, and the attendant moratorium, Miss Primkins had hidden away what little gold she had in the bottom of a coffee canister, with the coffee put in again artlessly on top. Since then she had added to her store of gold, till at last she had £12 in all.

On hearing this I scented the trouble, and began to commiserate: "You don't mean to say someone has stolen it! Who could it have been?"

"Oh, no; it hasn't been stolen—though

sometimes I almost wish—but there, I oughtn't to say that! No, the difficulty is that now I don't know how to get rid of it! I never thought there was any harm in putting a little by, in case anything happened, till I saw in the papers that someone said" (lowering her voice) "that those who hoard gold are traitors to their country, and" (in a still more shocked tone) "actually helping Germany! I'd never had any such idea! Why, it's the very last thing I should wish to do!

"So I started unhoarding at once and took a sovereign when next I went out to pay my little grocery bill. Miss Jarvis wasn't in the shop herself—she wouldn't have been so rude!—but her assistant said, 'Well, I never! Doesn't it seem odd to see a sovereign again! I can't tell you when I saw one last. I didn't know there was a solitary one left in the village! Wherever did you get it from, Miss Primkins?'

"Do you know, I went hot and cold all over; didn't know what to do with myself, for fear she should guess I'd been hoarding and helping the country to be a traitor—no, I mean helping Germany to be—well—you understand. I just said quietly, with all the composure I could muster, 'I chanced to have it in my purse,' because, after all, it wasn't her business, was it?"

I agreed that it wasn't.

"Then I thought I would change half a sovereign—that would be smaller and look less hoardingish—at the station, as I was going into Chepstow to get some more wool for those socks for Queen Mary. Would you believe it?—the station-master said—you know his jocular way—'Why, Miss Primkins, what bank have you been robbing? I haven't had my hand crossed with gold, I don't know when! I'd like to keep it myself, for luck, only the Prime Minister would be down on me for hoarding, I suppose.'

"My knees shook so I could hardly get into the train. I decided I wouldn't let anyone see another bit of it; yet actually, when I was in Mrs. Davis's shop and getting out the money to pay for the wool, if I didn't take out another half-sovereign in mistake for a sixpence!—I was so unnerved, I suppose—and she said, 'Just fancy seeing a half-sovereign again! I thought they were all called in. Wherever did you light on that, Miss Primkins?'

"Now you can understand I'm at my wits end to know what to do with that money. I can't spend it without everyone knowing. If I put it in my savings bank book, and so get it back to the Government that way, I have to hand it over the counter at the post office. You know so much about business, can you suggest anything?"

I immediately offered to give the nervous, worried lady Treasury notes in exchange.

"Oh, but I couldn't let you incriminate yourself like that," she protested, "kind as it is of you. There's your reputation as well as mine to be thought of."

I explained, however, that it was easier to dispose of an accusing golden sovereign in London without arousing the suspicions of the populace than it was in the country, and I said I was sure my bank manager would oblige me by receiving the gold for the good of the country, knowing me to be an honest and respectable Englishwoman.

"I never thought to be so thankful to see the last of a sovereign," she said, as she tucked the paper notes into her handbag. "I've scarcely slept all this week. Why, Germany is the very last thing I would help!"

Mrs. Widow came in at the gate as Miss Primkins went out; and, seeing the house all turned out of windows, looked her surprise at such goings on! She carried a frying-pan, a long-handled broom, a double milk-boiler, an egg-beater, and a lemon-squeezer, and explained that they had kept beautifully dry in her kitchen, whereas they would have been ruined if left to get damp in an empty house. Parenthetically, she hoped I would excuse her having used half a dozen lemons I had left in the pantry last

time; she was afraid they would not keep; also some sugar in a tin, that she dare say might have melted away—and it seemed cruel to waste it considering the price of sugar.

Of course I said she was quite welcome.

And, by the way, was I wanting a jar of lemon curd? Her daughter had made some that was really lovely, and she would not mind obliging me by selling me a jar.

While she was describing the distinctive merits of the lemon curd, and relating what the lady of the manor had said in praise of the jar she had purchased, a man-servant arrived from the Manor House with a note and a basket, which he handed to me (with a very superior air that gave me to understand he was not in the habit of carrying baskets, and was only doing so now as a patriotic act in war time) across the kitchen table that stood in the path and blocked his further progress. While I read the note, he fixed his eyes upon his boots, and apparently looked neither to the right hand nor to the left; yet I know that he catalogued every item of those wretched domestic oddments that were decorating the lawn and garden path.

Mrs. Widow, possessed of a natural curiosity that it is hard to circumvent, was loath to leave without a glimpse of the contents of the basket. But Virginia got her off by escorting her to the

gate, and telling her that I had not been very well in town.

"Ah! anybody could see that, miss," said Mrs. Widow feelingly, glancing in my direction. "Don't she just look 'aggard!" And then, seeing a look of surprise on the face of Virginia —who distinctly resented my being described as haggard—she added hurriedly, "Leastways, I mean 'andsome 'aggard, of course, miss."

The lady of the manor had written to say that a cold was keeping her indoors for a day or two; but in the meanwhile, as they were busy curing bacon at the home farm, she had had them cut just a little piece of griskin, which she was sure I should like, and was having it sent up at once, etc.

The superior person left, carrying in one hand an envelope addressed to his mistress, which contained all the thanks I could muster, and in the other a note to be left at the village shop, asking Miss Jarvis to send me up a large block of salt.

"What shall you do with all the pork?" Ursula inquired.

"I haven't the faintest idea!" I said. "I can't bestow any of it on the poor because, no matter which piece I gave away, Mrs. Widow's married daughter would be sure it was *her* gift I had spurned, and would feel duly slighted."

Virginia broke in upon us breathlessly, her arms full of pasteboard, soup tureen, hearthrug, hassock, and fire-irons, which she had hastily gathered up from the path. "The Rector's outside in the lane talking to some children."

"And has *he* any basket in his hand?" asked Ursula.

"No, he only appears to be carrying his umbrella."

"Thank goodness!" said Ursula fervently, as she put the third flank of griskin in the coldest larder.

By this time the next caller was coming up the path, and though I could invite him to take a seat in one of the armchairs that were now inside, anything like order had not yet been evolved from the chaos.

The Rector is loved by rich and poor alike, by reason of his unselfishness, his absolute sincerity and "other-worldliness." He is now well on in years, but neither distance nor weather keeps him from visiting regularly all in his wide-scattered parish. His calls are always welcomed, though I admit I should have preferred to see him any day other than the one in question.

"I have come with a message from my niece," he began. "She told me to say that she is sending up a small trifle—a little housewifely notion of hers—for your kind acceptance. She

thought you might find it add a little variety to the cottage menu. As a matter of fact, the rectory pig has gone the way of most pigs! And we said, the moment we heard you had arrived, that we must get you to sample the home-grown article, so she is sending you up just a little piece of—— Ah, here it is, I expect"—as the Rector's handy man came in at the gate, carrying the inevitable basket; and though the contents were wrapped up in a spotless white cloth, there was no need for one to be told what he was bringing.

I tried to be as truly grateful as ever I could; I told myself I must not think about the gift itself, but must keep my mind focused on the kind thought that had prompted the gift. Nevertheless, the basket seemed very heavy as I carried it into the larder, and added one more joint to the goodly collection already assembled. And as I went back into the living-room, I heard Virginia warbling outdoors:

> "Not more than others I deserve,
> But Heaven has given me more."

There is something singularly exasperating about other people's joyousness, when it is purchased at one's own expense!

We were restoring the last jug to its proper hook on the dresser, when once more we saw

Miss Primkins toiling up the steep garden path.

She really felt terribly ashamed to be intruding on me again; but she had just read in the paper that the Prime Minister now said everyone must save, and no one who was a true patriot would spend more than was absolutely necessary. Now what was the difference between hoarding and saving? She did so want to do the right thing; it was so little she could do to help her country. Yet, for the life of her, she couldn't make out whether she ought to save that £12 or spend it.

Would I mind explaining it to her? She never could understand anything Prime Ministers, or people like that, said nowadays; so different from what it was in her young days. When there was only Lord Salisbury and Mr. Gladstone everything was so sensible and straightforward. Her father used to say: "Always believe Lord Salisbury; never believe Mr. Gladstone"—or else it was the other way round, she wasn't sure which. Whereas now, what with radicals, and coalitions, and territorials, and boards of this, that, and the other, her brain almost gave way trying to find out who anybody was.

"And when at last I think I've got it straightened out, I find there's a lot of 'antis,' and it's just the opposite thing they say you

ought or ought not to do; or else you have to begin at the other end and work backwards. What a lot those Germans have to answer for!"

I offered my own simple political creed for her guidance: "When the King or Lord Kitchener says anything, then I know it's all right. When they hold their tongues, I know it's equally all right; and the rest I don't worry about!"

She said I had expressed her own views entirely, only she never thought to put it so concisely as that. What a wonderful thing it was to have a brain like mine that grasped things so clearly! She should just go on being economical as her mother had always taught her to be, until the King—or, possibly, Queen Mary—said anything definite on the subject, then people would know where they were.

"At least, you aren't the only one bothered about the question of hoarding," I said. "I'm also wrestling with the problem. Look here," and I led the way to the larder and gave details. "I've been wondering whether, as I relieved you of your hoard, you could assist me out with mine! Will you accept a piece of griskin, merely to get it off my premises?"

Miss Primkins was almost tearful in her thanks. "It's so strange you should have thought to offer this," she said in a sort of broken hesitation, "because I'm going to Cardiff

by the first train to-morrow to see my sisters. I always like to take them a little something, you understand. They have big families, and business is bad now; and, of course, coming from the country—— Only eggs are so dear, and fowls such a price; and just now--well, you know—dividends aren't coming in as they did, and I've my three houses standing empty, and such a big bill for repairs, and—— Only, of course," rallying herself, "I'm heaps better off than those poor Belgians; but oh, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for your kindness. You see, I was keeping that £12 by me in case I should be ill—we never know, do we?—or to meet the rent if I should run short. Please pardon my speaking of these things, only—you understand," and the poor lady blushed to think she should have let herself refer to finances.

Yes, I understood. Rumour had already reached me that Miss Primkins had only used three hundredweight of coal through the whole of the winter (of course, in our village everybody knows how much everybody else buys of everything), and she had been seen out in the woods gathering sticks. She had cut her milk down to a half-pint a day, and that was consumed by Rehoboam (the cat). She seldom had any meat, and practised all sorts of pitiful little economies, living chiefly on the vegetables she had grown in her garden. But she never let

anything interfere with a coin going into the Sunday offertory, or her knitting for the troops; and she gave a donation to the Red Cross Fund as gladly as anyone.

It makes one's heart ache to think how many poor elderly ladies there are up and down the land, who have lost what at best was but a very modest meed of comfort, in the present financial upheaval; and these have additional anxiety in the fact that it would be torture to them were their poverty paraded before the world. They have not the physical strength to engage in national work, though their spirits are valiant enough for any self-sacrifice. So, since it is all they can do for their country, they shoulder their burdens uncomplainingly, keeping a frail body alive on sugarless tea and sparsely-buttered bread, while they knit long, long thoughts into socks and comforters, if by any means they can raise the money to purchase the wool.

No Fund is large enough to embrace such as these; no charity could ever meet their case. All the same they are part of the bulwark strength of England, these dear, faithful women, who in old age and feeble health hide their own privations beneath a brave exterior, willing to make any personal sacrifice rather than Might should triumph over Right.

"Miss Primkins!" I exclaimed, when I

heard of the Cardiff visit, "I believe you're the good fairy who, I used to think, lived at the entrance to the waterfall cave under the hill; and I'm certain you've been sent up here for the explicit purpose of relieving me of that meat! If you're going to Cardiff, it's your clear duty to take a griskin to each of your sisters—hearty-eating boys, did you say? Good! That will rid me of two! Well, you'll find them at the station in the morning waiting for the 9 o'clock train—we'll do them up to look like hothouse grapes and pineapples."

Of course she protested, but I remained firm; as I told her, I wasn't going to let slip such a heaven-sent opportunity to get those joints transported for life.

When Virginia and Ursula put them in the railway carriage next morning, she asked if they would mind, as they passed her house on their way home, seeing if they could find Rehoboam; he hadn't come back for his milk, and she couldn't wait for him. They would find the door-key under the fourth flower-pot on the right hand window-sill; and if he was waiting on the step (his usual custom about half-past nine) would they be so kind as to give him the milk that was in the larder? Then she need not worry any more about him.

They found Rehoboam as per schedule, and

gave him the milk. They couldn't help seeing that there was only a small piece of cold suet pudding, a little blackberry jam, and one thin slice of bacon in the larder.

When they got back we set to work on a cooking crusade; and isn't there a delightful sense of freedom when you can do what you like in your own kitchen, with no Abigail oversighting your operations! We cooked some griskin, and made pastry and cakes, and put some eggs into pickle. (Do you know these? hard-boiled eggs shelled when cold and put into pickle vinegar; ready in a couple of days.)

Then when it got to within an hour of train time, the girls went down and lit Miss Primkins' fire, taking down a scuttle of coals for the purpose; her outside coal-cellar being locked fortunately gave us an excuse for not using up hers. They also took some milk, three of my finest potatoes, and other things.

By the time the train arrived, and Miss Primkins was on a tired homeward walk, the kettle was singing on the hob; three floury potatoes—strained, but keeping hot in the saucepan—stood beside the kettle; the supper table was laid with cold griskin, a jam tart, and a small spice cake, while in the larder stood two sausage-rolls, a seed cake, and a jar containing three eggs in course of pickling.

Of course the girls couldn't resist ticketing

the things " Virginia made this, so be cautious ! (Signed) Ursula," and similar nonsense, hoping thereby to divert Miss Primkins from the bald truth, viz., that we were trying to smuggle something into a bare cupboard !

Then, after rounding up Rehoboam, and placing him on the hearthrug to give an air of social welcome, they locked the door, putting the key under the fourth flower-pot, and skipped up the hill again by the woodland path, as Miss Primkins turned into her little garden gate.

XIII

When the Surgeon Crossed the Hills

Of course, it seemed ridiculous for a sane and moderately well brought-up individual to dress herself to go out—and in a new hat, too—and, then, simply because her dog happened to tumble out of the window, to collapse on the hearthrug like an anæmic concertina, while she draped her head gracefully over the fender, with the plumes of the said new hat resting resignedly on the fire-irons.

It didn't seem quite reasonable to want to go to sleep like that. Still, as I showed signs of doing it once more, after they had propped me upright again, they decided to put me to bed.

When I woke up, they told me I was ill. That seemed ridiculous, too, and I said so; and added that now I had had a little rest I intended to get up and go to town—important appointment; couldn't possibly be spared, etc.

And they all said lots of things—you know the kind of arguments your friends always bring to bear on you if you chance to be just a little out of sorts. I tried to make them understand that I was indispensable to the well-being of

London; that, though *they* might be in the habit of shirking work under the slightest pretext of a headache, *I* wasn't that sort of a person. I owed it to my conscience, as well as to the world at large, to be at work in my office within half an hour, penning words of wisdom that should keep the universe on its proper balance.

Ursula merely asked if I liked the milk with the beaten egg *quite* cold or a trifle warm?

In the end I had to give in. They insisted I was ill; and I admit I was feeling unusually tired.

But as the weeks went by I did not get as strong as I had hoped to do. I seldom got farther than an easy-chair, and not always as far as that. So at last I determined to try the cure that hitherto had never failed me. Trunks were packed, and they got me down by easy stages to the cottage among the hills. I felt that if only I could see the flowers and breathe the air that blows way over from where the lighthouse blinks in the channel, I should certainly pick up both my strength and my courage.

When I reached the cottage the autumn sun was setting on hills that were a gorgeous blaze of brilliant crimson, yellow, bright rust, gold, pale lemon, chestnut brown, with the dark green of yew-trees at intervals. I have never seen

colours like our autumn hillsides anywhere in the world, though, of course, they can be matched in places where the woods are made up of a wide variety of different trees. After the murk of London in October the glory of it all fairly dazzled me.

The garden was lovely too, but in a wistful sort of way. Snapdragons and zinnias and eschscholtzias were blooming lustily; there were still blossoms on the monthly rose bushes; nasturtiums flaunted in odd corners, and made splashes of brightness; the purple clematis over the porch was in full flower; fuchsias, geraniums, belated larkspurs, hollyhocks, and sweet alyssum talked of summer not yet over; while peeping out from crevices among the stones and nestling at the roots of trees were primroses already in flower; violets were blooming in the big bed by the kitchen door, and the yellow jasmine was smothered in bloom—such a curious mixture of summer and spring overlapping, with no hint of autumn and winter in between.

The fruit had not all been gathered in, and the trees in the orchard were bowed down with masses of crimson and pale green and golden yellow and russet brown, with spots of colour dotted about among the lush grass. It seemed impossible that one could remain ill in such an earthly paradise!

I was too tired with the journey to go round

the garden that day; I put it off till to-morrow. Next day I was not equal to going out at all, and the third day I did not get up.

The colours gradually faded from the hill-sides; the woods grew a purply-brown; the white mists were later and later in rising from the river in the valley below me. All day long I lay in bed watching the sun move from east to west across the mountains, while near at hand tomtits and finches, jays and magpies, cheeky robins and green and crimson woodpeckers flitted about in the bare trees just outside my windows.

One little wren used regularly to pay me a morning call on the window-ledge; often she flew right into the room. I liked to think she came to ask how I was. Once I opened my eyes to find a robin perched on the rail at the bottom of the bed, eyeing me inquiringly. The little wild things on these hills seem so friendly.

As soon as twilight fell the owls woke up the adjoining wood, and called to other owls across the ravine.

These were the only sounds to break the silence.

It is when you are ill, more than at any other time, that you realise the human difference between town and country. You can live all your life, and then be ill and die, in London, and

the people next door—even those in the same building—may know nothing about it.

I knew of a girl living in a block of small flats occupied by women workers, and trying to make a living by journalism, who lay dead in her room for a week, and then was only discovered by the caretaker because her rent was overdue. No one had missed her, though there were women going up and down stairs and in and out of the rooms, all around her. The isolation of the solitary woman in a crowded city can be something awful.

It isn't that town dwellers at heart are more selfish than country folks; it is their mode of life that is to blame.

London claims so much of one's time and energy for the doing of "most important" work, and the pursuit of machine-made pleasure, till next to nothing is left for the greatest of all work and the greatest of all pleasure—merely being kind.

Once it was known that I wasn't getting better and the local doctor had been summoned (he lives in another village nearly four miles off), kindnesses came from all directions, everybody offering the best they had. If extra people had been required to take turns sitting up at night, any number were ready to come on duty. One woman who is exceedingly capable, though

an amateur masseuse, came to inquire if it was a case where rubbing would be beneficial. She brought a bottle of Elliman's with her, in case she could be of use, and offered to come daily.

Did the Buff Orpingtons lay that priceless treasure, an unexpected mid-winter egg? It was promptly sent up by a small child, with a kind hope from mother that the lady would be able to take it.

I believe Sarah Ann Perkins would have slain every duck she possessed (and have scorned to take payment), if only there had been the slightest chance of my once more eating that fair slice from the breast!

A calf's foot was needed for jelly. The butcher hadn't one, didn't know who had; but one arrived next day, though he had had to scour the county for it.

Was anything required hurriedly from the village shop? Everybody was willing to go and fetch it, or Miss Jarvis would toil up with it herself, after the shop was closed, rather than I should be kept waiting, bringing up a bunch of early violets from her garden at the same time.

One farmer's wife trailed up the rough, wet paths, with a little pigeon all ready for roasting, in the hope that it might tempt me.

The handy man went out and shot an owl because he was sure I must find all they hooters

a turr'ble noosance. Of course he didn't know how I love the owls, nor how companionable it seemed to hear them calling to one another through the long, long night. But probably the kind thought behind his gun was of greater worth than the bird he shot.

Yes, everybody was anxious to do something, only there was so little they could do—till one day Angelina lost herself! She had followed Abigail in the afternoon to the village, where a dog suddenly scared and chased her, and she flew off into the woods.

Abigail hunted for her till the winter dusk settled in, but no cat responded to her calls. So she had to content herself with mentioning the matter at each cottage in the vicinity, everyone willingly undertaking to keep a look-out for the missing cat. By the next afternoon every youngster in the village was out scouting for her, and saucers of milk were placed enticingly outside doors.

But poor Angy was never seen again.

I missed her very much. She was only a very ordinary tabby, but she was a large, comfortable, homely sort of a cat; and she had made it part of her daily programme to come upstairs and jump softly on my bed with a pleased little mew, and then settle herself down beside me, where I could reach out my hand to stroke her, while she purred soothingly the

whole time. The little dog was too boisterously demonstrative, in his joy at seeing me, to be allowed in the room; but the more sedate and gentle Angelina helped me to pass many a weary hour.

When all search for her proved fruitless, the kindly village people didn't dismiss the matter as done with. Forthwith there started a procession from the village to my house, and about every hour someone arrived with an offering. I could hear their voices at the door below, through the open bedroom window.

First it was a labouring man with a big hamper: "My missus is so worrit about the poor young lady losing her cat, so I've brought up our Tom, if she'd care to accept him. He's a fust-class ratter—killed a big 'un in our barn yesterday," etc.

Then it was the piping voice of a small girl, accompanied by two smaller: "Please, we're so sorry about the lady not having a pussy when she's poorly, and we've brought her our two little kitties, an' one has six toes!"

Next a bigger girl: "Gran says would miss like one of our kittens? They'll be able to leave their mother next week, and I'll bring the lot up for her to choose from, if she'd like one."

A boy arrived with a basket containing a fine black cat. "Mother's sent this for the lady. Just you see how he'll jump over my hand and

stand on his hind legs!"—(a wild scramble followed). "Here, Peter! here—come *back*—Pe-ter! Puss, puss, puss! There now, I've done it! Mother said as I wasn't to open the basket till I was inside the house! I 'spect he's back home again by now! But I'll bring him up again presently. The lady'll love to have him, he's so knowing."

Later, I heard a woman's voice: "Poor *dear* soul, it *do* seem hard; and the on'y cat she've got, too! Well, we've six to our house, and she can have all of ourn and welcome."

As Virginia said, it was not quite so embarrassing as griskins, because, at least, each had four legs with which to get itself off home again.

But it is weary work lying still day after day till the weeks actually lengthen into months. I kept on telling myself I was making headway, but it was a poor pretence. I gave up thinking about it at last, and wondered how I could best endure the pain that no one seemed able to relieve.

The autumn had now changed to winter, and one morning I woke to see snow bearing down the fir-trees and lying on the hills. The snow is very beautiful when one is well and strong, and able to go out in the crisp cold air and enjoy it; but to me, penned in among the hills, miles away from town and the advantages of up-to-date

civilisation, it gave a sudden sense of desolation. It shut me off most effectually from the big world I wanted so badly to see again. As I looked out upon that snow, it seemed as though I were buried already.

One desire swamped all others, and that was the longing to get back to London where friends would be around me, and specialists within easy reach. And yet that appeared to be an utter impossibility. It has always been a matter of pride with me that my cottage is situated in one of the most inaccessible spots in the British Isles; I used to feel so happy in the thought that it was only with the utmost difficulty that a vehicle could be got near the garden gate. It gave me such a sense of seclusion and delightful "far-away-ness" after the crush and hustle of town life.

But for once I wished I had been a wee bit more accessible. I realised that there might be certain advantages in having a good county road close by whereon a helpless invalid could be driven to the station without having every bone in her body jolted to pieces! But it was too late to do anything now.

Altogether it was two months before I let anyone in town know how ill I really was; most people thought I was merely taking a long rest. Naturally it was at once suggested a specialist should be sent for; but I said no. I was such a

weak creature by this time, I felt I couldn't bear to hear the worst—I was almost sure there would be a "worst" to hear—and that a specialist wouldn't diagnose my illness as merely overwork. I insisted that I would rather be left to die quietly. I know it sounds very cowardly, and I *was* a coward at the time. But I think many women will understand this condition of mind; we do try so often to push back, with both our hands, trouble of this sort, when we dimly see it ahead.

The hale and hearty person will naturally exclaim: "How perfectly ridiculous! How much more sensible to have proper advice, and then set to work to get strong again!" I know! I have myself said this sort of thing to ill people many a time in the past! But I learnt a lot of things during that breakdown; among them, that it is very easy to lay down the law as to what should be done, and to act in a common-sense manner, when one is well; but it is quite another thing to follow one's own good advice, or, in fact, do anything one ought to do, when one is too weak even to think!

Yet how often it happens that, in our direst extremity, help comes when least expected! So soon as it became known in town that I was really seriously ill, there appeared among my morning letters a note from one of London's most famous surgeons saying that he was coming

down on a friendly visit in a couple of days "just to see if I can help you at all."

I read the letter a second time, and then all my fears vanished. Someone coming "to help" me seemed so different from a formal consultation. That phrase was better than reams of ordinary sympathy, or kind inquiries, or professional expressions. And then I felt so glad that the matter had been taken out of my hands. It seemed as though a weight was lifted from my brain, and being a feeble as well as a foolish creature, at first I put my head under the eider-down and had a weep—for sheer gratitude; but a few minutes later I rubbed my eyes and felt I was heaps better already!

Yet the way was not entirely clear, even though this busy, over-worked specialist was offering to spend more than a day in journeying right across England to the far-off cottage; there was the snow to be reckoned with, and, when it likes, the snow on our hills can frustrate anybody's best-laid plans. The sky was very grey; I did hope no more would fall, otherwise the roads would probably be impassable.

Owing to the scarcity of trains in our valley, the local doctor was to tap the main line some miles away, and meet the great surgeon; and a rich resident was kindly loaning a cherished new

car, as the doctor did not consider either of his own motors worthy of the occasion.

But even he was dubious as he looked at the heavy skies. He said he could manage to get the car through eighteen inches of snow; but if it were deeper than that——! I remembered that only a couple of years before I had been snowed up in the cottage with drifts six-foot deep. The outlook wasn't exactly encouraging.

Such heaps of tragedies seemed possible within the next twenty-four hours. Suppose, for instance, royalty should suddenly develop some malady necessitating arms or legs being amputated without delay——! I simply dared not think about such a calamity; and even though the specialist escaped a royal command, and actually set off to catch the train that was to bring him to our hill-country, there might be an accident; London streets are beset with terrors; I never realised till that moment how many dangers a man must face between Wimpole Street and Paddington Station! But I tried to have faith that all would be well.

I heard a soft step in the room—every step that came near me was softened nowadays. I opened my eyes and saw Abigail beside my bed.

"Please, m'm, do you happen to know if the specialist-doctor takes pepper?" she asked in the half-whisper that she had adopted as her bedroom voice.

"I haven't the remotest idea," I said; "but why do you want to know?"

"Because we've just smashed the glass pepper-box, and we haven't another down here. And I can't exactly put it on the table in a mustard-pot!"

I watched for the snow, the eighteen inches I was dreading; but the wind changed and it didn't fall. Instead, next morning found us enveloped in a solid fog—the only fog we had had this season. Hills and valleys were blotted out as completely as though they had never existed. The cottage seemed to stand in mid-air, with nothing but grey unoccupied space around it. And it was such a raw, penetrating fog.

I just lay and watched the grey, blind world outside the windows, and counted the half-hours as the morning wore by. And isn't it amazing how long the very minutes can be when one is right-down ill, and waiting for a doctor?

In a small isolated community like ours, one excitement is made to do duty for a long while. The impending visit of the surgeon from London was soon the topic of general conversation. And little white curtains were pulled aside from cottage windows as the car, with the doctor and a stranger, was seen coming down one hill and over the bridge into the village in the valley,

switchbacking again up the opposite hill to reach the particular crag on which my cottage is perched.

Owing to previous heavy rains, the lanes were almost impassable in places; overflowing brooks made rivers and swamps in most unexpected spots. Thus it was that the car could not come within half-a-mile of the cottage; it had to be "beached" high and dry in somebody's farmyard, and the rest of the journey made on foot. The walk is a positive fairyland dream in summer; but on the bleak December day the ferns and flowers were gone, and the withered grass stalks rustled with a disconsolate wheeze, while the pine-trees creaked and moaned in the wind. It seemed an unkind, inhospitable sort of a day to bring a busy, valuable man such a long, cold distance.

At last I heard brisk footsteps coming down the path to the door, scrunching the cones that had fallen from the larches. Then a cheerful voice was speaking, while great-coats were being taken off down below. I shut my eyes, and felt I need not worry any more.

After all, we women are curious creatures! We consult a specialist when we have some weakness that won't give way to ordinary treatment, and then, when, out of his exceptional knowledge and wide experience, he tells us what

will probably cure us, many of us immediately beseech him to make it something else.

When the surgeon told me what course it would be necessary to take if I was to be got on to my feet again, I immediately began to state a hundred reasons why I wished he would prescribe something entirely different. He said he was going to have me brought to London at once and taken to a hospital. I knew that was the very last thing I could endure. I have always had an absolute terror lest I should ever have to go into a hospital; and here I was confronted with it face to face. I said I could *not* go into one; whatever treatment was necessary must be done in my own home. I didn't want to be among strangers and with nurses whom I had never seen before; I wanted to be nursed by people I knew. And as for chloroform, well, I would gladly die first! such was the horror I had of it. And I continued on these lines.

The surgeon listened very patiently and let me have my say out. (Where in the world does a man like this get his marvellous stock of patience from!) He even agreed with most of my arguments. Anæsthetics were disagreeable; it certainly would be pleasanter to be in my own home; and it might be nicer if I had only friends around me, etc.

But, all the same, it was borne in upon me that I might as well try to get the Sphinx to

turn its head and nod over to a pyramid, as to attempt to make the man who was talking to me budge an eighth of an inch. And he wound up by saying, "I am afraid, however, that it will have to be a hospital—I'm so sorry—but I want you to go into a private ward in Mildmay. You shall have the best man in London to administer the anæsthetic; and as for nurses—well, if you don't say they are some of the finest women you have ever met, I shall be much surprised."

By this time I had my head under the eider-down again, and was howling away (quietly). I was so truly sorry for myself!

The great man waited for a minute, and then, as the sniffles didn't stop, he said—

"Now just listen to me. You are in the habit of writing heaps of good advice to people when they are in trouble—telling them to have faith when adversity comes, and to bear their burdens bravely. Don't you think you are a most inconsistent person? Here you are, confronted with something that is going to be a trifle trying, and you immediately turn your face to the wall, and say you prefer to die, without so much as giving a solitary kick! Why, Hezekiah isn't in it, beside you! What is your faith worth at this rate!"

Then for a good half-hour he sat and talked, reminding me of our duty as professing Chris-

tians; of the wrong we do when we try to shuffle away from our work; of God's care for His children individually, and of our foolishness in doubting Him in times of trouble.

I had got to a very low ebb spiritually as well as physically. Being cut off from the world and so much alone, with only a pain to think about, my outlook on life had become altogether distorted. My soul was certainly in need of a bracing up just then—and it got it.

One thing impressed me very much at this time, viz., the marvellous power that lies in the hands of those who can bring healing to the soul as well as healing to the body. The most devoted of God's ministers have seldom such power as this. They can bring messages of hope and consolation, but they do not know how much a sick person is able, physically, to stand in the way of a strong spiritual tonic, and they seldom dare administer one, even though they may think it necessary.

But the doctor knows how much the patient is equal to. And the man who has consecrated to God's service a life that is spent in mending the poor broken bodies of humanity is surely doing work that angels might envy; undoubtedly God gives him power and opportunity that falls to the lot of few other men.

The December afternoon closed in early, and

the surgeon had once more to take a long, dreary journey to get back to the urgent work waiting for him in town. But he left behind him a far more sane and sensible person than he had found on his arrival.

When he had gone, after having made the most comprehensive and detailed plans for my removal, Abigail tiptoed into my room, her face all aglow with excitement.

"I thought you'd like to know I heard the specialist-doctor say, when I was bringing in the sweets at lunch, that he didn't know when he had eaten roast chicken he had enjoyed so much. I shall rub it into cook when we go home. And I'd better let Sarah Ann Perkins know, as we got it from her."

"Take whatever is left, and keep it for a souvenir," I said. "And if you like to have the carcase framed, I'll pay for it."

"You look better already," she replied.

Thus the great man scattered cheeriness in various directions; and Sarah Ann, a year later, pridefully showed me the chicken's wings a-top her best Sunday bonnet.

In just as much time as it took my London doctor to come west to assume charge of me, they got me under way.

"But how am I ever going to reach the main road!" I wailed.

"Perfectly easy," said Ursula. "You are going to be carried, and every masculine in the place is willing to lend a hand."

And so they did. One young man made himself entirely responsible for my luggage, going off with it by train, that there should be no chance of any delay. A stalwart fisherman and a sturdy young farmer carried me, in a chair, straight up hill for half a mile to where a motor was waiting on the county road.

Everybody was so gentle and quiet, and yet very businesslike. They stood silently, with their hats off, while I was put into the car. I looked round on the hills, convinced that I was looking at them for the last time, and felt exactly as though I were present at my own funeral!

Even the people in the village kept sympathetically in the background, with the same sort of respect one observes when a funeral procession passes; though at the last house in the village one dear kindly soul pulled her little white curtains aside, waving her hand and smiling encouragingly to me as we went by.

XIV

In Mildmay Hospital —An Interlude

I DON'T think there is anything worse than the sense of utter desolation that envelops you when the hospital door finally closes on everybody you know, and you are alone with total strangers and unknown terrors ahead. The dreariest moment of my whole life was when I found myself alone in a private ward at Mildmay, with no one whom I knew within call.

Yet was it mere chance, I wonder, that the nurses at their prayers that day sang Matheson's beautiful hymn—"O Love, that wilt not let me go"?

It came to me along the corridor, as I lay staring at the ceiling. I tried, in my heart, to sing it with them; but I gave it up when they got to the verse—

> "O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
> I cannot close my heart to Thee;
> I trace the rainbow through the rain,
> And feel the promise is not vain
> That morn shall tearless be."

I couldn't see the rainbow just then.

Nevertheless, I got to love that room as one of the happiest spots on earth, for the sake of the people whom I found there; and during the

ten weeks I remained in it, I proved beyond all chance of further doubt that when God seems to be taking from us, He is in reality giving us something better than all we could ever ask or think. At the moment of the taking, perhaps, our eyes are too dimmed to see this, but in the fulfilment of time, when He wipes away our tears, may it not be that, in addition to banishing our sorrows, He will clear our vision, that we may see how marvellously He made all things work together for good?

Next day I remarked, irritably, that I didn't like the green walls, and I thought the green bedspread positively bilious.

The matron, looking at me with a twinkle in her eyes, said, "Dear lady, you shall have another bedspread this instant; and as soon as you are well enough to be moved, we will re-paint the walls whatever colour meets with your approval;—we can't do it while you are in bed, can we? Meanwhile, I shall call you 'Delicate Fuss'!"

(And "Delicate Fuss" I have remained ever since.)

But there was such an amount of misery bottled up inside me, some of it was obliged to spill over, and I once more reiterated my desire to die.

"That's all right," said the matron cheer-

fully; "but how about your tombstone? You would like a really artistic one, wouldn't you? And being literary, surely you would wish to edit what is to go on it. Now let us see what we can scheme out."

So we all settled to a discussion of shapes and styles and suitable words. The nurses warmed to the work, the ward sister came in to give her views, and for the first time for weeks I found myself smiling. Finally, it was unanimously decided that the most appropriate and truthful description would be these simple words—

"SHE WAS PLAIN BUT OCCASIONALLY PLEASANT."

But the time came when I was beyond even discussing tombstones; when I could not bear a sound in the room and even quiet footsteps jarred me. Then it was that I found out more especially what the spirit of Mildmay stands for. It was no mere perfunctory service that was rendered the invalid. Doctors, matron, nurses said nothing of the extra hours of work they put in on my account; of the watching and the tending when they were really supposed to be off duty. It seemed wonderful that I, who had looked forward to the inevitable with a terrible dread of being lonely and among strangers, should actually find myself, when the time came, surrounded by friendly faces, and cared for by people who had grown very dear to me.

And fancy a hospital where they went to the trouble of bandaging up the door-handles to prevent noisy bangs; where they laid down matting to deaden the sounds in the corridor; where they fixed peremptory notices to the doors, enjoining all and sundry to close them quietly; where even the ward-maid constituted herself dragoness-in-chief, for the time being, watching and waiting, and then pouncing on any unthinking person who might let a latch slip through her fingers, or a house-porter who might clatter a coal-scuttle.

Yet this—and a great deal more—is what they did at Mildmay, just because one patient was going through a bad time.

Thanks to all the care I received, I was at last able to leave the hospital. Of course I was glad to go out into the big world again—who wouldn't be, after lying all that time with no other "view" visible from where I lay but three chimney-pots? I was glad to think I was going to be able to walk again, and take up my work once more. But I felt genuine regret at having to say good-bye to the people I had really grown to love during my stay with them.

I shall never forget the morning that I was taken away by a couple of nurses to the seaside. The others came, in ones and twos, to say good-bye. And in the midst of it, the great surgeon

walked in—just to see what the patient was like before she started.

"Now confess," he said, "a hospital isn't such a bad place after all, is it?"

I agreed with him; but I couldn't put into words what a wonderfully good place I had found it.

I could only think what a contrast was presented between the poor, forlorn thing who arrived those months before, and the still-very-wobbly, but cheerfully-smiling, person who was now driving away, while the nurses leaned out of the upper windows and showered rice all over the vehicle.

XV

The Return to the Flower-Patch

And because it is the correct thing to introduce a wedding into the last chapter, I had better mention the one I know most about.

I always did say that, whenever I married, my wedding should be characterised by everything appertaining to common sense; while all the feebleness and foolishness and weakmindedness I had noticed at other people's weddings would be entirely lacking. I have often remarked how strange it is that otherwise sensible people seem to lose all idea of proportion when it comes to arranging a wedding; how they let themselves be obsessed with clothes and furniture and wedding presents that they don't require; or if they do require them, they might have been dealt with on orderly systematic lines.

"Why need there be a chaos of garments in the spare room and every wardrobe and chest of drawers in the house just because one person is going to be married?" I have said many a time. Well, I'm not going to say it again. In fact, the older I get the more I find life resolves itself into one continual discovery that I needn't have said half the things that I did say in my first youth.

But with regard to the wedding. I think I started all right; it was as matters proceeded that I was overtaken by the inevitable. I really was too busy with arrears of work that accumulated during my long illness to see to the trousseau details *in extenso*, so I asked an intimate friend if she would take this in hand for me—which she kindly agreed to do. She had had lots of experience, and her taste was exquisite; so I knew matters were safe with her. She asked me what frocks I already had. I replied, "Not a rag fit to wear!"

"Then I'll make a good selection, and have them sent home for you to choose from," she replied, her face suffused with that joy-radiance that invariably overtakes a woman who starts out shopping with a blank cheque in her hand-bag.

She certainly did make a good selection; I almost wished it hadn't been quite so good, then at least I should have known what to send back. But as it was, every fresh box I opened, I exclaimed, "Isn't that lovely! I *must* have *that!*" till presently the room was a billowy sea of tissue paper and beautiful garments that looked as though hands had never touched them. I thought I was quite hardened and proof against lures of this kind; but the snare of it simply enmeshes you before you know where you are. As my bedroom was soon full to overflowing, I

said the rest of the things had better go into a spare room. Very soon the spare rooms were full too. And so we went on like that!

Why didn't I put the things away in drawers and wardrobes? Simply because every such receptacle I possessed was full to distraction before the trousseau things started to arrive! Did you ever know a woman who possessed a drawer or a wardrobe peg that wasn't already over full, and she pining for more space? So for weeks we had to hop over piles of cardboard boxes no matter what room we entered, and scrabble up more bales of tissue paper and things to make room on the sofa for the friend who called to bring her good wishes in person.

Still, I have always thought that a strong argument in favour of a woman getting married is the fact that she, presumably, comes in for additional drawers and wardrobes. Hence I looked forward to getting into my new home with considerable satisfaction in view of the purchase of extra furniture.

"Yes, I know it's a bit crowded just now," I agreed, when Virginia suggested I should set up a shop with "Modes et Robes" over the door, because she had estimated that I shouldn't need to buy any tissue paper for eleven years and five months. "But I shall have *heaps* of spare room when I get into the new house; I really shan't

know what to do with so many chests of drawers!"

But alas! in spite of the additional furniture, I am still squeezing things into drawers that would be so much more useful if made of elastic india-rubber instead of wood. And I am still flattening garments into wardrobes that are so bulgingly full that I wonder sometimes whether the looking-glass will stand the inside pressure. And still I don't seem to have a rag fit to wear.

But the moving process was even worse than the trousseau. The very thought of it was turning my brain to stone.

When I mentioned my quakings about the moving to the Head of Affairs, he said airily "Don't you give a solitary thought to *that*. Just go away for a couple of days' holiday, and when you come back you will find everything as right as can be in the new house. You don't need to touch a thing or pack an atom. The men do *everything*. Now, why bother your head with unnecessary worrying?" etc.

I seemed to think I had heard the same remark made in the dim past when we removed from one house to another in my early days. I also remember that the brother of Virginia and Ursula said the very same thing to them when they moved, and they, acting on masculine advice, had the greatest difficulty, ultimately, in

ever finding any solitary thing they possessed (including themselves) among the ruins. So I decided to postpone the couple of days' holiday and face the worst.

There is no need to go into details about that move. Those who have been through it know exactly how many months it takes to find such things as the corkscrew, the buttonhook, the oil-can belonging to the sewing-machine, the one hammer that has its head fixed on firmly.

They know the joy with which you fall on the missing sofa cushions when they are eventually discovered done up with spare bedding in the attic—that everyone has been too tired to undo; and the affectionate greetings bestowed on the hall clothes-brush when it is at length found—in company with the dog's whip—in a drawer one has forgotten in a small table. Of course, it's very satisfactory when the perspiring gentleman who has packed—and then unpacked again—all the china comes to announce, "Not a single piece is cracked or chipped, madam;" but when you survey the piles of crockery and glass on the kitchen dresser and table and window-ledge and mantelpiece, that haven't yet found an abiding-place, and see the pantries full to overflowing, a lurking thought comes that perhaps it might have been an advantage if he *had* smashed a few dozens of the multitudinous array of cups

and saucers and plates and dishes that seem woefully superfluous at the moment!

As there seemed a good bit still to do, I said I would dispense with the conventional "tour," proper to the occasion, and spend the time trying to dispose of the twenty-seven British workmen, supposed to be house-decorating, who were cheerfully in possession (and apparently regarding their posts as life appointments) when our goods arrived at the door, despite our having let them live in the house rent free for two months previously.

It was a little difficult to follow their twenty-seven lines of argument as to why they should remain with us permanently, with Abigail continually at my elbow presenting a tradesman's card and explaining—

"Please, ma'am, this man says he served the people who were here before; but I've told him he's the ninth fishmonger who has said that to-day."

Or else it would be, "There's a man at the door says he served the last people with groceries. Can I tell him to run back and get some soap? I can't find where the men put our packets, and it will be quicker than sending to the Stores. I suppose you don't happen to have seen it, m'm? Cook and I have looked everywhere. But we've found the anchovy sauce, and the carpet beater. Where *do* you think they had packed them——" and so on.

But I determined to do my wifely duty in making a happy home for the man who had had the courage to marry me.

I was politely attentive when interviewed by a near-by magnate who was anxious to propose the Head of Affairs for the Conservative Club. I accepted particulars supplied me by the secretary of the Golf Club, who felt we were the very people the club needed. I tried to understand when the gardener explained the peculiarities of the greenhouse heating apparatus, and the danger that would threaten if anyone but himself entered the greenhouse.

I endured the postman knocking at the door a dozen times a day to inquire if we lived there, only to point out to us that we didn't when we had assured him that we did. I informed the sweep that everything was quite satisfactory thank you, and I should hope to have the pleasure of meeting him again.

I accepted the coal man's many reasons for not having delivered the coal sooner; and I thanked cook for the information that the policeman said he or his mate would always be on point duty at the corner whenever we wanted him.

I filed half a bushel of tradesmen's price lists and laundry data.

I put the whole household on a milk-pudding diet, rather than waste the numerous samples of

milk left, by rival and mutually abusive dairymen, in a row of cans at the side door.

And when a sumptuously apparelled resident called to say that the previous occupant had always contributed liberally to the local working men's brass band, I tried to look gratified to hear of such generosity—though I had the presence of mind to say I should not be at home on Saturday evening when they proposed to serenade me in the front garden.

Yes, it was a pleasant and peaceful couple of days, and I dare say I should have been all the better for the complete rest, had not the telephone men and the gas stove men called simultaneously with the electrical engineers (who had been summoned to see why the electric light sulked), and, with a unanimity of purpose that was truly beautiful in a world so full of variance, they all set to work to take up floor-boards, in rooms and halls where the carpets and lino had been laid—the twenty-seven standing around and assisting with reminiscence and anecdote.

Then it was that the Head of Affairs put down a firm foot and insisted on the Flower-Patch.

At first Abigail was reluctant to leave such bright scenes in the kitchen as she hadn't known for several years; but, remembering that a halo of distinction surrounds the bearer of exclusive

information, no matter how unimportant, she set off cheerfully next morning, and we followed a day later.

She prided herself on the tactful way she broke her news to the village.

"Hasn't Miss Klickmann come down 'long with 'ee?" inquired Mrs. Widow and the handy man in unison.

"You'll never see Miss Klickmann again," Abigail replied in funereal tones.

"Oh! You don't tell me so! Poor *dear* thing! though I knowed she wasn't long for this world," and kind-hearted Mrs. Widow started to mop her eyes with her apron. "Was it very suddint at the last?"

"Very!" said the handmaiden. "Couldn't make up her mind till the very day before the wedding."

When they had grasped the true state of affairs, and imbibed enough particulars to have filled three newspaper columns, Mrs. Widow hurried off home, and then on to the village, likewise conscious of the halo of distinction. But the handy man paused—

"I wish I'd er knowed a bit sooner," he said, "then I'd er made an arch with 'Welcome' on it as large as you please. Yes, I'd er like to have had an arch. But thur,"—after a moment's thought—"perhaps I'd better do a bit o' weedin' and cut the grass."

Thus it happened that I was once again going along the road, over which they had carried me only seven months before. It was cold and cheerless then; now it was all flowers and sunshine.

The kindly, motherly soul who lives in the end house was at her gate now, watching for our coming.

"Well there! Well there!" as the wagonette stopped for me to speak to her. "I thought I should never see you again"—and she grasped my hand in her own, having first polished it on her apron, which is always fresh and spotless. "And now here you are. My dear, I'm *that* glad to see you back, and I do hope you'll be happy."

The stalwart fisherman, standing on the river bank, raised his cap—I hadn't forgotten the good work he had done for me. Miss Jarvis at the village shop came to the door and waved her hand—I remembered the box of violets and moss and little ferns she had posted to the hospital.

In the cottage itself kind hands had been hard at work; it was simply a bower of wild flowers. The walls inside were nearly smothered with trophies of moon daisies, grasses and ferns, and the same scheme of flowers was carried all up the stairs. On the window ledge on the landing were bowls of Sweet Betsy and cow parsley—and such a pretty mixture the crimson

and the white flowers made. Upstairs the rooms were gay with bowls of forget-me-nots and buttercups. Downstairs it was wild roses and honeysuckle, with mugs of red clover on the mantelpieces. Being summer, the fire-grates were at liberty, and these were filled with branches of bracken, ivy, silvery honesty seeds, and foxglove. Everything had such a delightfully "misty" effect, by reason of the seeding grasses that had been added lavishly to the flowers.

The only garden flowers in the house were some roses, in the centre of the dinner-table, sent by Miss Jarvis (with some pale green young lettuces) from her garden.

Outside the swallows were twittering, and, like all the other birds, were fussing about their small families. The distant hills were glowing crimson by the acre where the timber had been cut, I knew it was myriads and myriads of foxgloves. Near at hand the Flower-Patch was a mass of nodding blossoms, coupled, with a choice variety of weeds. I wondered where I had better begin, and how I should cope with the bindweed, flaunting itself everywhere that it had no business to be. Had I better start the handy man on it at once, or would it be better to set him to cut the hedges?

But even as I was planning out a good week's work for him, I saw him coming up the path, a

picturesque figure in a blue jersey, a large, shady, rush hat, and carrying, as signs of office, a pitch-fork, a scythe, and a rake ; and I heard his voice in the garden speaking to the Head of Affairs : " Good-day to 'ee, sir. I'm main glad to see 'ee, for I calkerlate as how in future I takes my orders from the master."

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